

# *Spathodea campanulata*: African Tuliptree<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman, Dennis G. Watson, Ryan W. Klein, Andrew K. Koeser, Deborah R. Hilbert, and Drew C. McLean<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

A native of tropical Africa, this large, upright, 50 to 60-foot tree has a dense, 50-foot-wide crown and one-and-one-half-foot-long, pinnately-compound, evergreen leaves composed of four-inch leaflets. Due to its size it is best located in large, open landscapes and is generally not suited for small residences unless your objective is deep shade. During winter and until late spring, African tuliptree produces terminal clusters of beautiful blooms held above the foliage, a profusion of upwardly-facing, orange and yellow flowers which open several at a time from curved, two-inch-long, fuzzy brown flower buds filled with water. African tuliptree is quite spectacular when in bloom. It is often used as a framing, shade, or specimen tree but must be used only in frost-free areas. Also, its soft, brittle wood is easily broken by high winds, and trees should be located either in sheltered locations or where falling branches will do no damage.

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Spathodea campanulata*

**Pronunciation:** spath-OH-dee-uh kam-pan-yoo-LAY-tuh

**Common name(s):** African tuliptree

**Family:** Bignoniaceae

**USDA hardiness zones:** 10B through 11 (Figure 2)

**Origin:** native to tropical Africa

**Invasive potential:** caution, may be recommended but manage to prevent escape (south); not considered a problem species at this time, may be recommended (north and central)

**Uses:** specimen; shade



Figure 1. Full Form—*Spathodea campanulata*: African tuliptree

1. This document is ENH-758, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date November 1993. Revised February 2013 and December 2018. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.
2. Edward F. Gilman, professor emeritus, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, former associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department; Ryan W. Klein, graduate assistant, Environmental Horticulture Department; Andrew K. Koeser, assistant professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center; Deborah R. Hilbert, graduate assistant, Environmental Horticulture Department, GCREC; and Drew C. McLean, biological scientist, Environmental Horticulture Department, GCREC; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Nick T. Place, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.



Figure 2. Range

## Description

**Height:** 50 to 60 feet

**Spread:** 35 to 50 feet

**Crown uniformity:** irregular

**Crown shape:** upright/erect, round, spreading

**Crown density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** coarse

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite

**Leaf type:** odd-pinnately compound; made up of 6–8 pairs leaflets and one terminal leaflet

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval), oblong

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen, broadleaf evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 1½ feet; leaflets are 4 inches

**Leaf color:** dark green and glossy on top, paler green underneath

**Fall color:** no color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy



Figure 3. Leaf—*Spathodea campanulata*: African tuliptree

## Flower

**Flower color:** yellow to orange red with yellow tips

**Flower characteristics:** very showy; bell-shaped, ruffled-looking, and emerges in clusters on terminal racemes

**Flowering:** primarily late winter to spring, but also year-round



Figure 4. Flower, Variation—*Spathodea campanulata*: African tuliptree



Figure 5. Flower, Variation—*Spathodea campanulata*: African tuliptree

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** boat-shaped

**Fruit length:** 6 to 12 inches

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard; woody, 2-valved capsule

**Fruit color:** turns from green to brown

**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; not showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/branches:** branches droop; not showy; typically one trunk; no thorns

**Bark:** tan and smooth, becoming gray, scaly, and shallowly furrowed with age

**Pruning requirement:** needed for strong structure

**Breakage:** susceptible to breakage

**Current year twig color:** brown

**Current year twig thickness:** medium

**Wood specific gravity:** unknown





Figure 6. Bark—*Spathodea campanulata*: African tuliptree  
Credits: Gitta Hasing

## Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases of major concern.

## Reference

Koeser, A.K., Friedman, M.H., Hasing, G., Finley, H., Schelb, J. 2017. Trees: South Florida and the Keys. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

## Culture

**Light requirement:** full sun

**Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; loam; acidic; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** low

## Other

**Roots:** can form large surface roots

**Winter interest:** yes

**Outstanding tree:** no

**Ozone sensitivity:** unknown

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** unknown

**Pest resistance:** free of serious pests and diseases

## Use and Management

Eliminate major branches that will form embedded bark as early as possible. Save those that are oriented more horizontally, with stronger attachments to the trunk. Keep them from growing larger than about half the trunk diameter by periodic thinning.

African tuliptrees will grow rapidly in full sun on any soil of reasonable drainage and fertility. Plants should be regularly watered until well-established and will then require little care.

Propagation is by seed, softwood cuttings, or root suckers.