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Bauhinia x *blakeana*

Hong Kong Orchid

Family: Fabaceae

Flower Display: A+

Fort Myers, Florida Late November

Fort Myers, Florida Late November
The standard is the uppermost petal.

Hong Kong Orchid

Synonym (Discarded Names): None found
Origin: Hone Kong
Growth Rate: Fast
Zone: 9b—12b, 26°F minimum
Growth Rate: Fast
Light Requirements: High
Plant type: Evergreen but significant leaf loss towards the end of the blooming season
Flowering Months: Late October to March
Intense Blooming Days: 119
Messiness: High, December to February
Salt Tolerance: Medium
Drought Tolerance: High
Nutritional Requirements: Medium
Typical Dimension: 30’ x 25’
Human Hazards: None
Uses: Garden; park; parking lot; shade; street-scape

Origin

B. x *blakeana* is of obscure origin. The original tree was discovered in the garden of a ruined sea-side home in Hong Kong. It is often reported as a natural hybrid of *B. variegata* and *B. purpurea*. However, such a progeny has never been duplicated. *B.* x *blakeana* is sterile and produces no seedpods, further adding to its desirability. It must be produced by grafting, and not from cuttings. *B.* x *blakeana* is the floral emblem of Hong Kong.

Leaf

The leaf is simple and the margin entire. The petiole is stout. Leaves are ordinarily 5.5 to 7.5 inches long and 4.0 to 6.5 inches wide. The blade is bilobed, and is typically divided from the apex to about 1/3 but as much as 1/2 of the length of the blade. The blade is as usually wide as it is long. It is broadly ovate to subcircular in shape. The base is cordate. There are about 11 or 13 prominently raised veins radiating from a small arch just above the petiole. Leaves are alternating in their arrangement on the stem.

Flower and Blooming Period

The flowers have five widely spaced rose-purple to orchid pink petals. The standard is flared red. There are five long and sterile stamen. Flowers are sweetly fragrant and are very attractive to hummingbirds. They are produced on stout pedicles on new growth at the end of long, slightly arching branches. There is a distinctively long intense blooming days of about four months, far longer than most other flowering trees. Each blossom last for three to four days. They fall freely during the flowering season to be replaced by fresh blooms waiting in buds on tight terminals or axillary racemes. The raceme contains a few to about 20 flowers. The fallen petals make an attractive groundcover, or a messy litter, depending on ones point of view.

Leaf: Simple, alternate, broadly ovate to subcircular, notched to 1/4 to 1/2 its length, and ordinarily 5.5 to 7.5 inches long and 4.0 to 6.5 inches wide.
Flower: Rose-purple to orchid pink, five petals, 5 to 6 inches wide, five sterile stamen
Fruit: Sterile tree, produces no fruit

The leaf base is cordate. There are about 11 or 13 prominently raised veins radiating from a small arch just above the petiole.

Fort Myers, Florida Late November

Sanibel, Florida Early December

In February and March, the flower display occasionally wanes, as if to signal the end of the flowering season, but readily picks back up in a day or two.

Planting and Maintenance

B. x *blakeana* is fast becoming a useful tree for roadways, parking lots and gated communities. Plant it in full sun or light shade. A young tree can be slow to establish, and can be open and awkward. The mature tree typically has a short trunk , if not pruned to restructure it, dense canopy, and brittle branches. Prune the tree, if desired, to remove crossing branches and to develop a pleasing canopy. Pruning can be done from March to August. Even trees pruned as late as August can still produce abundant flowers from December to March.

After flowering, *B.* x *blakeana* is semi-deciduous on irrigated soils and can be briefly and completely deciduous on very dry soils. Leaves will also fall because of cold winter temperatures. Interveinal chlorosis occurs on alkaline soils. Fertilize in March, June and September if necessary to keep leaves green and healthy.

Weevils are a problem on leaves. They will not kill the tree and can be tolerated if one can overlook the damage.

Mid December
A tree in full bloom. Notice the characteristically short trunk of untrained trees. Chlorotic leaves are to the left.

Illustration of the recovery of a mature *B.* x *blakeana* after severe pruning in mid May

June 5, about three weeks after pruning. The tree was without leaves when pruned.

June 16

July 19

August 9

October 22. A handful of flowers are now on the tree

November 26

Mid December
A tree in full bloom

Mid February
This tree growing on an abandoned lot has not been irrigated and is about to become briefly de-

References

Llamas, Kristen. Tropical Flowering Plants: A guide to Identification and Cultivation. 2003. Timber Press, Portland Oregon

Rowell, Raymond. Ornamental Flowering Trees in Australia. 1991. New South Wales University Press, Kensington, Australia

Staples, George and Herbst, Derral. A Tropical Garden Flora: Plants cultivated in the Hawaiian Islands and other Tropical Places. 2005. Bishop Museum Press, Honolulu, Hawaii

Useful Links

Flowering trees fact sheets
Florida native plants fact sheets
Red Silk-Cotton Tree YouTube

All pictures taken by Stephen H. Brown

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