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## *Bombax ceiba*

Red Silk-Cotton, Bombax, Kapok, Red Cotton Tree, Silk-Cotton

## Malvaceae

Flower Display: A



Fort Myers, Florida

Early March



Fort Myers, Florida

Late April



Selby's Botanical Garden, Sarasota, FL

Late February

Sometime in February, *B. ceiba* begins dropping all of its leaves. It is time for flowering and what follows is a sensational display of large silky red or orange flowers at the tips of bare branches. The spectacle attracts all kinds of birds, especially crows. It is from these flowers that the flocks will feed and simultaneously pollinate the flowers. The attractants consist of five silky petals surrounded by five groups of stamens tipped with little black anthers. In February and March the ground around the tree reflects the excitement up top as spent flowers take their turn littering the ground. Flowers are short lived but the branches supply enough flowers for 29 days of splendor. In May, white cottony strands, from opened fruits, float downward, settling on the ground, houses and whatever else is in their way. However, these inconveniences are short term and are worth it because of the flower show put on by *B. ceiba*. The tree does not begin to releaf until almost all the flowers have fallen. Even without its flowers, *B. ceiba* is still an impressive tree: giant in size, up to 100 feet tall, it displays stout, prickly branches arranged in horizontal tiers emanating from a straight, rough, spiny trunk with buttress roots. The trunks of the oldest specimens lose much of their spines. *B. ceiba* is rare in cultivation and always impresses tourists and first-time viewers. Propagation is by seeds, large cuttings or by air layering. For dark green leaves, grow it in deep soils that are acidic

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Fort Myers, Florida

Mid March

***Bombax Ceiba***

**Incorrect:** *Bombax malabaricum*

**Origin:** Asia, Australia, Malaysia

**Zone:** 10a—12b, 30°F minimum

**Growth Rate:** Fast

**Flowering Month(s):** February—March

**Flowering Days:** 29

**Leaf Persistence:** Deciduous from February– April

**Messiness:** High in February– March, May

**Salt Tolerance:** Low

**Drought Tolerance:** Medium

**Nutritional Requirements:** Medium

**Typical Dimension:** 80' x60'

**Uses:** Park, Shade, Specimen



Fort Myers, Florida

Late March

Continued from previous page

or well-mulched. Alkaline soils tend to induce yellow leaves and manganese deficiency. Manganese deficiency occurs on newer leaves in that the veins remain green, and stand out prominently. Trees from seeds begin flowering when 8 to 10 feet tall, and can reach 30 feet in five years. Fertilize twice annually, and water freely in fall and early winter to induce spectacular late winter bloom.

**Leaves:** Palmate, to 24 inches long, with rarely 3-4, and commonly 5-7, lanceolate leaflets up to 10 inches long, attached to a long flexible petiole

**Flowers:** Heavy, up to 7 inch wide flower having 5 satiny red or orange petals reflexing strongly after opening

**Fruits:** Capsules, oval woody to 6 inches long filled with small cotton-covered seeds

[Tropical Flowering Trees List](#)

Questions/Comments:

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