

Flowering Trees Create Cool Canopy

By: Luis Llenza

In the peak of summer, a canopy of trees creates cooling shade, not only for outdoor activities, but also for the house itself. The trademark palms in our tropical climate contribute greatly, and gracefully to providing respite from the heat of direct sun. But there are other choices. Add variety to your landscape with color and fragrance while increasing shade by planting a few flowering trees.

Eucalyptus deglupta – Rainbow eucalyptus is the common name given to this fast growing, sun-loving tree prized for its colorful bark. This evergreen can grow up to 10 feet per year, and soar beyond 100 feet in its native Philippines and western Pacific islands habitat. While it does produce flowers, the rainbow eucalyptus will be the star of the yard because of its peeling, smooth bark which displays colors described as red, orange, dark green, light green, blue, gray—even iridescent when moist, and changing colors in waning light.

Pachira aquatica – Water Chestnut, Guiana Chestnut, Malabar Chestnut all refer to an unusual and beautiful shade tree that produces spectacular flowers and edible fruit. This tree likes full sun and thrives in a lakeside or wetlands area with periodic flooding. Foliage is dense, sometimes obscuring the flowers, which emerge from foot-long buds. Cream colored petals droop and fall away to reveal showy clusters of slender white stamens (3-4 inches long) tipped in red. The elongated woody seed pods (12 inches long, 5-inch diameter) contain the edible nuts which are harvested when the seed pod bursts. Nuts are eaten raw, fried and roasted; young leaves and flowers are cooked as vegetables.

Artocarpus heterophyllus – Jackfruit growing in your yard may be a neighborhood novelty and will yield delicious fruit. It is a fast grower in full sun and should be pruned at about 15 or 20 feet, or it will grow to 45 feet or higher. An evergreen, Jackfruit has glossy, oblong leaves and makes an attractive landscape specimen. But it is the fruit, growing mostly along the main trunk, which will grab all of the attention. Large and somewhat oval, with a bumpy, spiny rind, a ripe jackfruit can weigh between 10 to 60 pounds, or more. Ripened fruit is eaten fresh; immature fruit is cooked.

Capparis cynophallophora – Jamaican caper is a Florida native, evergreen shrub that can be coaxed into a 20-foot tall tree, or an attractive hedge with careful pruning. It is a slow grower that likes full sun, but it will also tolerate partial shade making it a fine candidate for use as an understory tree. Flowers are delicately arranged white petals at the base of white anthers and long purple stamens. There are hundreds of varieties of flowering trees available to accent your Florida garden.

To help you find the perfect specimen for your space, visit www.rarefloweringtrees.com/.