

Pride of Barbados Provides a Fiesta of Color

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



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PHOTO CREDIT: William M. Johnson

Pride of Barbados provides a tropical accent to local landscapes and a fiesta of vibrant color from late spring to late autumn.

Q: We moved into a new home this month and one of our new neighbors has several tropical-looking plants in their front yard that have been putting on an eye-catching flower display. The flowers appear in clusters and range in color from yellow to red. What is the name of this plant? Is it too late to plant some in my yard?

A: The common name of this plant is Pride of Barbados. It's used as an accent plant for tropical landscapes where it provides a fiesta of vibrant color in our growing area from late spring to late autumn. This plant is impossible to ignore when in full bloom.

Pride of Barbados is also known by several other common names which re-

fer to its showy nature. Such names include flame tree, peacock flower, and red bird of paradise. Even botanists recognized this plant's beauty as the word "pulcherrima" in its scientific name (*Caesalpinia pulcherrima*) means "very pretty."

This Caribbean native





celebrates the warm summer season, hitting its stride in flowering during the toughest part of summer when many of our color plants are languishing during the dog-days of summer. Even with this summer's 100+ degree temperatures, Pride of Barbados will perform very well when provided with supplemental irrigation.

Botanists refer to this plant as a small flowering tree or treelet since it can grow to 15+ feet in height. The flowers are slightly fragrant and range in color from all yellow or red, a combination of both colors, or in shades of pink. Individual flowers are two or more inches wide with five wrinkled, cup-shaped petals. Each flower (technically called a floret) has 10 long, protruding stamens. Pride of Barbados plants comes with or without spines.

Pride of Barbados is a legume. After flowers have faded, lima bean-shaped pods are produced. Pods start out green, then a flushing red, and eventually turning shiny brown. Mature pods are 3-to-6 inches long.

This plant is easy to start from seeds. Germination will be speeded up if the seeds are nicked with a file before planting. Under good growing conditions, Pride of Barbados will self-sow and may even become weedy.

They are very easy to grow in either alkaline or acid soils provided they are well-drained. To encour-

age maximum flower production, prune flowers after they are spent and before seed pods reach 1-to-2 inches in length. Pride of Barbados will grow well under full sun to partial shade condition. However the flowers bloom best in full sun. It is also drought tolerant once established.

Area nurseries still have a supply on hand. You will be rewarded with your own display of tropical flowers lasting into the early fall season.

Q. The entire trunk of my oak tree is covered with a silken, spider-like web. What's wrong? What can I do to treat this?

A. The silken web is produced by barklice; and yes, they are insects but don't get out the nuclear bug killer arsenal because barklice are very beneficial. The trunk of a heavily webbed tree will typically appear to be covered in a white silk stocking. Sometimes only patches of the silken webs will be noticed.

This seems to be the season for barklice, judging from the numerous calls to the Extension Office regarding this creature. Even though they are called barklice, they are not true lice and they are not parasites. They do not harm trees and, in fact, are very beneficial. Barklice occur on the trunks and primary branches of a number of trees where they feed on lichens and fungi growing on the bark. While barklice occur most

frequently on oak trees, they can occur on most types of landscape trees except for pines and other conifers.

If you have excellent vision and look very closely at the webbing, you may be able to locate clusters of very small, brown-colored, soft-bodied insects. Even though the webs may become unsightly, try to avoid using insecticides since barklice are of benefit to the tree. The silken webs will disappear by late summer or early fall.

Q: The bark on my crape myrtles is peeling off and it looks like it has been shredded and just hangs off the trunk and some of the lower branches. Is this normal?

A: As crape myrtles age, the bark will begin to peel off. The horticultural term for this is exfoliating. This is normal and there is no cause for alarm. After the gray bark peels away, you may notice a different shade of underarm. Some of the newer varieties have colors that are cinnamon to dark brown in color. This colorful underarm adds to the beauty of a crape myrtle especially in the winter. Go ahead and peel the bark off once it starts shedding to hasten the exposure of the underbark.

