

## THE FLOWERING TREES OF AMERICA

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**T**HE normal dry season at Peradeniya rarely exceeds a period of six weeks or so, occurring during the months of January and February. This year, however, this dry spell extended over the exceptional period of between eleven and twelve weeks with the result that our trees and shrubs developed their flowering characters to an extent rarely seen before.

*Tabebuia Guayacan.* Hemsl.

*A new and fine flowering tree.*

Of the great variety of flowering trees that now flourish in Ceylon, the majority of which have incidentally been introduced from other countries, few can exceed in beauty our recent introduction from Panama and botanically known as *Tabebuia Guayacan*.

The seed of this plant was received with a batch of others from Prof. Balme of the Botanical Exploration Institution, Mexico, in February, 1933. Only a few seeds germinated and of the seedlings raised, three were planted in the Gardens in December, 1934. The specimen (not reproduced) is the tree planted near Curator's Office in a particularly open site free from roots of other trees and open to sunlight the greater part of the day.

Growth has been satisfactory throughout though soil is of a poor cabooky nature and only the normal attention such as watering and stirring around the bed in its young days has been given the plant. Our experience of the tree and a study of its habitat indicates that the tree should thrive well from sea level to about 3,000 feet in the moist zones and probably with greater success in the semi-dry and dry zones.

The tree has not set any seed though flowering so profusely and it is apparent, as with some other trees such as *Cassia multijuga*, that dry zone conditions are necessary for fruiting functions. Propagation by gootee is therefore in hand and distribution will be made to drier areas in order to obtain seed so that it may be propagated and distributed on a large scale.

Wherever grown and flowered it will undoubtedly be a very conspicuous feature of the landscape. It has reddish purple to deep maroon large and trumpet shaped flowers with a yellow throat, produced in compact clusters on every branch and twig. To Europeans its counterpart would be that of the Rhododendron of gigantic dimensions and particularly floriferous. It lasts in flower for three to four weeks after which it is deciduous for two or three weeks. This tree is a decided asset to Ceylon's long list of flowering trees.

*Tabebuia argentea.* Britton

(Syn. *Tecoma argentea.* Bur. & Schum.)

*Another rare and beautiful flowering tree*

The past dry season has developed the flowering characters of this plant at Peradeniya as never before. The flowers of this species are a clean canary yellow, are borne in large bell-like clusters on all parts of the branches, intermingled to advantage with the grey silvery leaves from which it obtains its specific name.

The tree is a recent introduction, seed having been received from the Bureau of Plant Industry, Washington, U.S.A, in August, 1931, under the name of *Tecoma argentea*. Germination was good and many seedlings raised, a few being planted in the Gardens and the rest distributed to outside gardens. Hitherto the garden trees had flowered somewhat sparsely but in the recent long sunny spell these trees flowered to their maximum and were a wonderful sight.

The habitat of this species is Paraguay and its growth and progress at Peradeniya indicates that it is more particularly suited to the drier zones, particularly Uva side of the country. It has a somewhat restricted habit of growth and should be ranked among the smaller growing flowering trees. It has this year set fruit for the first time so that its multiplication is assured and seedlings become available for disposal at Peradeniya from now onwards.

***Tabebuia serratifolia* (Vahl) Nichols.**

(*Syn. Tecoma araliacea* D.C.)

*A very fine flowering tree.*

A valuable acquisition among the garden flowering trees is the above named. It is on a par with the previously described species *Tabebuia Guayacan* if not even more floriferous, the flowers, being a rich golden yellow which really needs to be seen to be fully appreciated. The illustration gives some idea of the freedom with which the tree flowers.

The older specimens flower in March–April, whilst the younger plants usually flower earlier, in February and March, the older lasting in full flower for a period of five weeks or so, whilst the younger last three weeks or so, the new young growth forming earlier in the younger trees than in the older. It has not seeded at Peradeniya as yet, our plants being raised by root cuttings, but does so at higher Uva elevations or where there is no S. W. Monsoon rains.

It is a tropical tree of the West Indies and of British Guiana and in Ceylon is suited to both wet and semi-dry regions and to an elevation from sea level to 4,000 feet. In its habitat it is recorded chiefly as a timber tree and no record is made of its flowering properties which is surprising since this tree must be one of the most spectacular of the world's flowering trees in its season. Very little is in fact known or recorded of any of the *Tabebuias* (which are all of Tropical America and the West Indies) either botanically or commercially. It is known as the "Yellow Poui" of Trinidad, or "Washiba" of British Guiana. The history of the Garden's original trees is obscure, yet it is a fairly recent introduction, of about 1910 or 1911. When the writer joined the Gardens in 1914 there were among other interesting plants in the nursery a batch of seedlings of about two or three years of age bearing the label *Tecoma leucoxydon* but which bore little resemblance to our trees growing under this specific name. In the monsoon months of the same year plantings were made in the arboretum Natural Order and in other portions of the Gardens. In 1926 the arboretum plant flowered and specimens were sent to Herbarium for correct identification and the Systematic Botanist thus established the species as *Tecoma araliacea* D.C. (D.C. Prodx. IX 221 (1845)) and it has since then borne this name in the Gardens.

On a further check for purposes of the present notes however it is observed that a later investigation into the species of the *Tabebuia*s of America by Sprague and Sandwith, presumably on material collected during the Oxford University Expedition to British Guiana in 1929 (Kew Bulletin for 1932, pages 18 and 93), it was established that *Tecoma araliacea* of Brazil is synonymous with *Tabebuia serratifolia* of West Indies and Venezuela. The new classification has however yet to appear in the Kew Index Supplement which is normally our Garden's guide to nomenclature.



***Tabebuia rosea* D.C.**

*A pink flowering Tabebuia*

A good garden standby among the flowering trees and one that can always be relied upon to make an exceedingly fine show in the drier months of the year is the pink *Tabebuia* (*Tabebuia rosea*). So well does this species grow at Peradeniya that the parent trees have reached a height of 84 feet and base circumference of 12 feet with a fine rounded head, and at flowering time they are a sight to behold with their masses of pale pink to pale mauve bell-shaped flowers borne on every branch of the tree. Full flowering continues over a period of a fortnight or more with intermittent flowering for a week or so before and after. In the later period immediately after full flowering, the ground is literally carpeted with pinky mauve flowers.

Records show this tree to have been received here in 1881 and the original trees still remain in the South Garden near Director's bungalow. Its habitat is Venezuela and the West Indies and in Ceylon it thrives well from sea level up to about 3,000 and 4,000 feet. It is not particular in its soil requirements but does better in a heavier loam or cabooky soil than in a sandy soil. It is suited to both wet and semi-dry zones and to the dry zone also in any situation such as near a well, where it can occasionally obtain water. Since the tree seeds freely its distribution is becoming a wide one and this fine species is now recommended as a roadside tree also.

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