**Caesalpinia pulcherrima**

**Dwarf Poinciana**¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

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**INTRODUCTION**

Brilliant scarlet and yellow flowers, feathery foliage, and quick growth make Dwarf Poinciana a popular evergreen shrub (Fig. 1). It is hard to find a more attractive flower. Also known as Barbados Flower-Fence, this open-branched, fine-textured shrub will tolerate hot, dry areas, and forms an effective thorny barrier. It flowers year-round with peak displays in spring and fall.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Scientific name:** *Caesalpinia pulcherrima*  
**Pronunciation:** sez-al-PIN-ee-uh pul-KAIR-ih-muh  
**Common name(s):** Dwarf Poinciana, Barbados Flower-Fence  
**Family:** Leguminosae  
**USDA hardiness zones:** 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)  
**Origin:** not native to North America  
**Uses:** reclamation plant; specimen  
**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

**DESCRIPTION**

**Height:** 8 to 12 feet  
**Spread:** 10 to 12 feet  
**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms  
**Crown shape:** round  
**Crown density:** moderate  
**Growth rate:** fast  
**Texture:** fine

**Foliage**

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)  
**Leaf type:** bipinnately compound; even pinnately compound  
**Leaflet margin:** entire  
**Leaflet shape:** elliptic (oval); oblong  
**Leaflet venation:** pinnate; reticulate  
**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen  
**Leaflet blade length:** less than 2 inches  
**Leaf color:** green  
**Fall color:** no fall color change  
**Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

**Flower color:** orange; red; yellow  
**Flower characteristics:** very showy; year round flowering

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**Fruit**

- **Fruit shape:** pod
- **Fruit length:** 3 to 6 inches
- **Fruit covering:** dry or hard
- **Fruit color:** brown
- **Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

**Trunk and Branches**

- **Trunk/bark/branches:** droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; not particularly showy; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; thorns are present on the trunk or branches
- **Pruning requirement:** requires pruning to develop strong structure
- **Breakage:** susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break
- **Current year twig color:** brown; green
- **Current year twig thickness:** thick

**Culture**

- **Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun
- **Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained
- **Drought tolerance:** high
- **Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate

**Other**

- **Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem
- **Winter interest:** tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers
- **Outstanding tree:** not particularly outstanding
- **Invasive potential:** little, if any, potential at this time
- **Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

**USE AND MANAGEMENT**

Full sun is preferred for best flowering but some shade is tolerated. Any soil is suitable as long as it is well-drained. Dwarf Poinciana is perfectly suited to informal plantings. This is a beautiful, refreshing
addition to any garden or yard as a specimen or as an accent toward the middle or back of a shrub border. Tipping the branches during the growing season creates a fuller shrub and more flowers. With some training and pruning, you can create a small, 12 to 15-foot-tall multistemmed tree, but the natural form is a low branched, full, widespreading shrub about 10 feet tall and wide. Allow plenty of room for this plant to develop as a shrub.

Propagation is by seed which germinate faster if scarified or soaked in hot water.

**Pests**

Scale will present an occasional problem.

**Diseases**

Dwarf Poinciana is susceptible to mushroom root rot, especially in poorly-drained soil.