**Spathodea campanulata**  
**African Tulip-Tree**¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

**INTRODUCTION**

A native of tropical Africa, this large, upright, 50 to 60-foot tree has a dense, 40-foot-wide crown and one-and-one-half-foot-long, pinnately-compound, evergreen leaves composed of four-inch leaflets (Fig. 1). Due to its size it is best located in large, open landscapes and is generally not suited for small residences unless your objective is deep shade. During winter and until late spring, African Tulip-Tree produces terminal clusters of beautiful blooms held above the foliage, a profusion of upwardly-facing, orange and yellow flowers which open several at a time from curved, two-inch-long, fuzzy brown flower buds filled with water. African Tulip-Tree is quite spectacular when in bloom. It is often used as a framing, shade, or specimen tree but must be used only in frost-free areas. Also, its soft, brittle wood is easily broken by high winds, and trees should be located either in sheltered locations or where falling branches will do no damage.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

- **Scientific name:** *Spathodea campanulata*
- **Pronunciation:** spath-OH-dee-uh  
kam-pan-yoo-LAY-tuh
- **Common name(s):** African Tulip-Tree
- **Family:** Bignoniaceae
- **USDA hardiness zones:** 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)
- **Origin:** not native to North America
- **Uses:** shade tree; specimen; no proven urban tolerance
- **Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

**DESCRIPTION**

- **Height:** 50 to 60 feet
- **Spread:** 35 to 50 feet
- **Crown uniformity:** irregular outline or silhouette
- **Crown shape:** round; spreading; upright

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² Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.
Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: fast
Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: odd pinnately compound
Leaflet margin: entire
Leaflet shape: elliptic (oval); oblong
Leaflet venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen; evergreen
Leaflet blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: orange; yellow
Flower characteristics: spring flowering; very showy; winter flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated; pod
Fruit length: 6 to 12 inches
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns
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
Current year twig thickness: medium
Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: No entries found.
Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Eliminate major branches that will form embedded bark as early as possible. Save those that are oriented more horizontally, with stronger attachments to the trunk. Keep them from growing larger than about half the trunk diameter by periodic thinning.

African Tulip-Trees will grow rapidly in full sun on any soil of reasonable drainage and fertility. Plants should be regularly watered until well-established and will then require little care.

Propagation is by seed, softwood cuttings, or root suckers.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases of major concern.

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; well-drained
Drought tolerance: moderate
Aerosol salt tolerance: low

Other

Roots: surface roots can lift sidewalks or interfere with mowing
Winter interest: tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

Figure 3. Foliage of African Tulip-Tree.