



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*¹

Edward F. Gilman²

Introduction

This popular landscape shrub creates a bold effect with its medium-textured, glossy dark green leaves and vibrantly-colored, four to eight-inch-wide, showy flowers, produced throughout the year (Fig. 1). Cultivars are available with single or double flowers in shades of white, pink, red, yellow, peach, or orange, or combinations of these. Flowers are produced continuously in great abundance, making up for the fact that each flower will last only one or two days. Some selections have variegated foliage and appear to be covered with snow.

General Information

Scientific name: *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*

Pronunciation: hye-BISS-kus roe-zuh-sye-NEN-sis

Common name(s): Tropical Hibiscus, Chinese Hibiscus

Family: *Malvaceae*

Plant type: tree

USDA hardiness zones: 9 through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: hedge; border; mass planting; specimen; container or above-ground planter; foundation; trained as a standard; espalier; accent; attracts butterflies; attracts hummingbirds

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

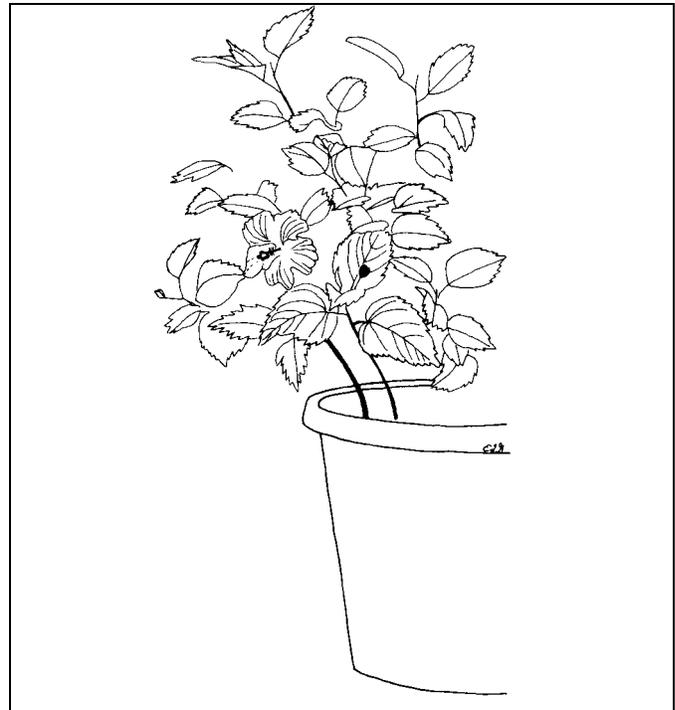


Figure 1. Tropical Hibiscus.

Description

Height: 7 to 12 feet

Spread: 6 to 10 feet

Plant habit: vase shape

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: fast

Texture: medium

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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

- Leaf arrangement:** alternate
- Leaf type:** simple
- Leaf margin:** serrate
- Leaf shape:** ovate
- Leaf venation:** palmate
- Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen
- Leaf blade length:** 4 to 8 inches
- Leaf color:** variegated
- Fall color:** no fall color change
- Fall characteristic:** not showy

Flower

- Flower color:** orange; red; yellow; pink; salmon
- Flower characteristic:** year-round flowering

Fruit

- Fruit shape:** oval
- Fruit length:** less than .5 inch
- Fruit cover:** dry or hard
- Fruit color:** unknown
- Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

- Trunk/bark/branches:** not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems
- Current year stem/twig color:** reddish
- Current year stem/twig thickness:** medium

Culture

- Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun
- Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; acidic; slightly alkaline; loam
- Drought tolerance:** moderate
- Soil salt tolerances:** poor
- Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

Other

- Roots:** usually not a problem
- Winter interest:** no special winter interest
- Outstanding plant:** plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Flowers may be infected with blight caused by *Botrytis cinerea* .

Bud drop can be caused by too much or too little water or over fertilization.

Use and Management

Growing best in full sun to dappled shade, Hibiscus appreciates abundant watering and fertilization when newly planted, but requires little care once established. Plants make attractive specimen plantings when given enough room to allow development of their natural arching form. Planted on three to four-foot centers, they can also be trained into hedges, but shearing often removes the developing flower buds. Instead, train into a less formal hedge with a hand pruner. Since plants flower on new growth, pinching the tips of developing branches in spring and mid-summer will increase flower production. Severe pruning in the summer removes flower buds and will reduce flowering for a period of time.

Hibiscus is occasionally trained into a small tree with multiple trunks and will grow to about 10 feet tall. A number of nurseries also offer Hibiscus as a standard with a single, straight trunk three to five feet tall with branches and foliage forming a neat, rounded canopy. Standards are often maintained 8 to 10 feet tall with regular clipping.

A few of the multitude of available cultivars include: 'Hula Girl', large single, canary yellow flowers with a red eye; 'President', single, six to seven-inch-wide intense red flowers with a pink throat; 'Sundown', double salmon orange flowers; and 'Seminole Pink', dark green foliage and bright pink blooms.

Propagation is by cuttings but some selections are grafted onto nematode-resistant rootstock.

Although usually strong and easy to grow, Hibiscus can be bothered by aphids which accumulate at the tips of stems, causing new growth to be misshapen. Aphids may cover the leaves with sticky honeydew. The insects can be dislodged with high pressure water sprays from the garden hose or controlled by pinching off the part of the twig with the insects. Over-fertilizing increases aphid infestations.

Pests and Diseases

If leaf spots are seen, pick off and destroy the infected leaves.

If bacterial leaf spot causes problems, pick off and destroy infected leaves.

Canker can kill branches or entire plants. Bright, reddish-orange fruiting bodies may appear on the bark. Prune out infected branches.