

Bougainvillea spp.

Bougainvillea is a colorful, large, sprawling shrub or vine which is native to South America. Each sprawling stem consists of alternately arranged heart shaped leaves and thorns. While the tiny white flowers are inconspicuous, brilliant colors are produced after new growth emerges on specialized leaves around the flowers called bracts.

In Brevard County, two species of bougainvillea are commonly used:

Bougainvillea spectabilis, the most frequently used, grows into a very large, sprawling shrub or vine to a height or spread of as much as 20 feet. Many varieties are available with colorful bracts ranging in shades of red and pink to purple, orange and white.

Bougainvillea glabra is more of a shrub-type, with leaves slightly smaller than *B. spectabilis*. Bract color is available in shades of lavender or purple. The *B. glabra* reaches a maximum height of 10 feet with equal spread.

Rockledge Gardens also carries two dwarf representatives of this species:

'Helen Johnson' is a true dwarf bougainvillea that will grow to about 3 feet high by 3 feet wide. New growth opens coppery orange and matures into a uniform pink color. This cultivar is ideal for use as a potted specimen, a groundcover, and as a mass planting, where it looks absolutely stunning!

'Flame Dwarf Orange' is another dwarf that grows into a rounded shrub about 5 feet tall. Bracts are an orangey pink. This variety can also be grown in a large container, or can function as a hedge or a specimen shrub.

All species of Bougainvillea are tolerant of the various soil types here in central Florida, but they **do** require good soil drainage for successful growth. They also require plenty of sunlight for growth and color. All bougainvilleas are considered tropical and are sensitive to freezing temperatures. If cold damage occurs, prune back in the spring to

promote new, healthy growth and increased color. In addition, plants have a moderate salt tolerance and can be grown on the dune line.

Planting

Although bougainvilleas grow in a variety of soils, best growth can be expected when plants are set in a well-drained, improved soil, in full- or half-day sun. Plants should be placed in the ground at soil level.

Watering

Water regularly after planting to encourage a deep root system, then reduce to only as needed. Bougainvillea are drought-tolerant plants and perform beautifully in any xeriscape (landscaping that doesn't require a lot of water) or other environmental design that minimizes the need for water use.

Fertilizing

Bougainvilleas have a high potassium requirement and should be fertilized two to three times per year. In March, June and September use a quality fertilizer such as **Suniland Bloom Special** and apply one cup per mature plant, more on larger specimens. Distribute the fertilizer lightly over the entire root zone.

Plant Problems

Caterpillars: Chew and eat large sections of, or even entire leaves.

Solution: Apply Thuricide at proper application rate as specified.

Failure to bloom: Not enough sun, too much nitrogen or too much water. Bougainvillea colors best in the somewhat harsh conditions of hot sun, little water, and low nitrogen fertilizers.