

Bougainvillea in South Florida

Along with palms, sunshine, and beaches, the cascading blooms of Bougainvillea are South Florida's signature tropical image. Bougainvillea grow well in LaBelle's sandy soil and climate and can be found blooming throughout the town and surrounding area. They do well in Muse also. As a profuse bloomer, Bougainvillea is most striking during the winter in South Florida, when it is at its peak and few other plants are able to provide color. In the landscape, its drought tolerance makes Bougainvillea ideal for South Florida climate year-round. As a woody clambering vine, Bougainvillea will stand alone, but it is perfect along fence lines and in mass plantings. There are several new varieties of bougainvillea which are low growing ground covers.

Bougainvillea's long arching branches are thorny (there are several thornless varieties), and bear heart-shaped leaves and masses of papery bracts in white, pink, orange, purple, and burgundy. There are hundreds of named varieties. There are several sizes available, from huge sprawling ten foot high shrubs to three foot shrubs to low growing dwarf ground covers. Make sure of the ultimate sizes of plants you buy at the nursery and design your planting accordingly. Virtually any nursery in the South Florida area has an assortment of Bougainvillea plants.



Mixture of several colors of Bougainvillea

Photoperiod/Flowering

Blooms occur only on new growth, so new growth on plants is vital to the achievement of flowering. Bougainvillea normally flowers during the short days of winter, but blooms are highly dependent on temperature. Newer hybrids bloom year around. Purchase plants in bloom in July and August to get the ever blooming hybrids. Some people cut bougainvillea back to the ground each year in June to encourage maximum flowering.

Common Problems

Bougainvillea are surprisingly free of problems. Some rare problems of Bougainvillea are:

- Leaf drop can be a problem as a result of over-watering (Bougainvillea cannot take standing water or poor drainage, period), under-watering, low light levels, or cold temperatures.
- New growth yellowing or chlorosis is often a result of a manganese or iron deficiency, and an application of a complete micronutrient blend or chelated spray should help, but use caution—too much of either Mn or Fe will result in a secondary deficiency, as the plant is unable to absorb one when the other is present at high levels. Four parts iron to one part manganese is recommended.
- For old growth chlorosis, apply Epsom salts at 1-2 tsp/gal as a drench or foliar spray.

Landscape Culture

Bougainvillea is a wonderful addition to any landscape. For the best performance out of your Bougainvillea, follow these guidelines:

- Keep established Bougainvillea on the dry side after the first two years, especially if you want lots of blooms.
- Use a low nitrogen high-bloom fertilizer sparingly.
- Plant Bougainvillea where it will receive a minimum of eight hours of sun per day.
- Don't trim Bougainvillea more than once a year, in June after flowering.
- Bougainvillea definitely are not good plants for hedges as they bloom on new growth and new growth is typically repeatedly trimmed off of hedges.
- Try to make as many new growth points as possible by a pinching often.

Planting

Bougainvillea has very fine roots which are very prone to damage during planting. When planting from a plastic container don't remove the container. Just cut out the bottom of the container and plant the ring of the container with the Bougainvillea. Just place the plant in the bottomless container in a flat bottomed holes. Don't stomp down the soil around the plant. Drench root ball with fungicide after planting. Water every two weeks for the first two years after planting.



'California Gold'



Orange Ice with double flowers



'Pink and White Surprise'



'San Diego Red'



'Temple Fire'



'Royal Purple'



'Miss Alice' thornless bougainvillea



Variegated Bougainvillea

General Information

Scientific name: *Bougainvillea* hybrids.

Pronunciation: boog-in-VIL-ee-uh

Common name(s): Bougainvillea

Plant type: shrub; ground cover

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (i.e. Bougainvillea will grow well in LaBelle, Muse and the surrounding area, all of South Florida actually)

Planting month: year round if done properly

Origin: Brazil

Height: depends upon supporting structure and genetics, 3 to 15 feet.

Spread: 10 to 20 feet

Usage: mass planting; color spot; ground cover; trained as a standard; specimen; espalier; hanging basket; cascading down a wall; container or above-ground planter

Flowers

Bougainvillea's colorful "flowers" are really bracts, or modified leaves, 1/2 –2-inch long structures to which the true flowers are attached at the mid-rib. New growth is required for inflorescence production, which occurs on short stem axes borne laterally in the axils of leaves. From their initial emergence to full maturity, the bracts of many cultivars change color. Bracts may retain their color for several months after the flowers have finished, gradually fading to resemble the color and texture of paper. The true, perfect flowers are inconspicuous, small, tubular, and surrounded by the showy, colorful petaloid bracts.

Pruning

Be aware that Bougainvillea have nasty one to two inch thorns and are difficult to prune without getting torn up. Bougainvillea responds well to pruning. Unless they are pruned regularly, bougainvillea grows into a tangled mass of old and new growth, and overcrowding often leads to pests and diseases. To prevent overcrowding, cut out any unneeded shoots. Cut all lateral shoots back to within two or three buds of the main stems. These will bear the new flowers and bracts.

Regular pruning is necessary to shape the plant and direct its growth because the shoots often grow vigorously. Flowers are borne on new growth, so pinching back and pruning is necessary to induce new growth. Pruning should be done after flowering has finished, as this encourages the new growth on which the next flush of flowers will occur.

To reduce the size of plants, cut them back by about a third, removing all spindly and twiggy growth. Prune suckers from the plant's base to encourage top growth. Dead wood should be removed as it appears. The long shoots can be trained in various shapes and heights— espaliers, arbors, twisted or braided trunks, or even large, fanciful animals.

This write-up is adapted from an IFAS write-up.

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