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Growing the Pride of Barbados Successfully

The Pride of Barbados, *Caesalpinia pulcherrima*, is a tropical to subtropical naturally evergreen medium to large shrub in the Papilionoideae (butterfly-like flowers instead of mimosa-like flowers) side of the Legume (Fabaceae) or Bean family. It produces wide spike-like (actually racemes) clusters of up to 40 ball-shaped red to pinkish red buds that open to reveal golden yellow and orange flowers that fade through shades of deep orange and red. The flowers are produced on new growth and it can flower continuously throughout the warmer months of the year and well into fall. The flowers are butterfly pollinated and our Sulphurs and Swallowtails seem unable to resist the bright colorful nectar rich flowers. Pollinated flowers are followed by flattened 'bean' pods that ripen to brown and split and twist open once fully mature dropping their hard tan colored seeds to the ground below.

The showy, free flowering Pride of Barbados is so well loved that it has been given such worthy names like Flamboyant-de-Jardin, Peacock Flower, Red Bird of Paradise, Mexican Bird of Paradise, as well as Dwarf Poinciana, named after another popular and showy tree of the tropics the Royal Poinciana. The species '*pulcherrima*' translates to beautiful which is perfectly fitting. The Pride of Barbados has also been named a [Texas Superstar® plant](#) and a Royal Horticulture Society Award of Garden Merit Winner in 2012.



This is a heat and sun-loving plant suitable for the hottest, sunniest site that you can find in your garden. It can be grown as a large shrub in zones 10 and 11, as a shrub to die back perennial in zone 9 and a die-back shrub in the warmest protected sites in zone 8B. In the coldest portions of its range, 8B-9, it should be provided with a loose breathable mulch to protect the stems during the coldest portions of winter. We prefer pine straw. Elsewhere it should be enjoyed as a container plant. Sharp drainage is a requirement anywhere that it will be required to go dormant in winter or grown as a container plant as root rot seems to be the only really downfall of this plant. During winter 'dormancy', in other words when the plant is not in active growth in cool northerly latitudes outside of its natural hardiness range, keep the plant on the dry side of moist and allow the soil to become moderately dry between waterings. During the growing season it should have average moisture but should never be kept overly moist or soggy. We do not recommend keeping it in a saucer of standing water for any length of time, as with most plants.

In mild winters and other areas where the Pride of Barbados does not freeze back it may get rather large and may even reach the 'small tree' designation. Some people purposely train them into single or multiple trunked tree forms. Others prune them back to within 6-18" of ground level in late winter or early spring each year to promote full bushy plants as well as to remove freeze damage. Young plants can be lightly tipped to help promote branching and fullness. Remember that this plant produces flowers on new growth and so pruning and tipping during the growing season may delay flowering by 4-6 weeks but the additional branching produced should actually cause it to produce more flowers in

the long term. Pruning should be completed by mid-summer whenever possible to ensure the new growth has plenty of time to harden off before winter.

In northerly latitudes as a container plant, provide a well-drained, moderately fertile soil. Our 4.5" plants can be up-potted to a 6" or 1-gallon container once outdoor temperatures are in the 70°F+ daytime and above 55°F at night and once they have started into growth. At this point they can be placed out of doors in a full to mostly sunny location and will prefer 8 or more hours of sun per day. When the Pride of Barbados is being overwintered indoors it should have the sunniest and warmest location possible such as a south facing window with direct sunlight. Temperatures should preferably remain above 55°F at night and in the 70°F+ range during the day. In northerly latitudes they may lose all but their uppermost leaves and this is not abnormal during this semi-dormant state due to the lower light levels we receive. Once the plants reach 2-3' high they can be up-potted again to an 8-10" container and can be held in this size container for a year or more. You may want to consider up-potting it to a 12" container the following season, again once it starts into growth. It can be repotted in this same container by carefully removing and replacing a portion of the old soil with new, being careful not to damage the root system. It can be maintained in this size container for several years with careful pruning during the growing season. Using a heavy, unglazed terra-cotta container will also help to keep the plant from blowing over. At some point you may be able to increase the container size especially if you use terra-cotta although it will make moving the plant more difficult.



Additional Resources for Growing Pride of Barbados

[The Pride-of-Barbados Becomes the Pride-of-Texas!](#) – Michael Arnold, 2007, TNLA Green Magazine 9(8):20 & 35

[“Pride of Barbados”- A Great Heat Loving Plant and Future Texas Superstar](#) – David Rodriguez, Bexar County, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, June 11, 2006

[Dwarf Poinciana \(Caesalpinia pulcherrima\)](#) – Florida State University, Sights Around Campus

Thank You & Good Growing,

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