Introduction

An evergreen shrubby vine, Bougainvillea is popular for its long-lasting, colorful flower bracts which appear periodically throughout most of the year but are especially plentiful in winter and spring (Fig. 1). Although flower bracts of purple or red are commonly seen, cultivars are now available in apricot, white, yellow, and orange. Bougainvillea can be trained to stand alone as a sprawling shrub, or allowed to grow naturally where it will quickly cover fences or climb up into trees. Planted on top of a wall, it will cascade over the side in great bouquets of color. With careful pruning, Bougainvillea can also be used as an espalier or in containers at poolside. It can also be trained as a standard with a single trunked tree. Dwarf cultivars are used as colorful ground covers. Plants can be grown in containers during the warm months in cooler areas of the country. They could be overwintered in a warm spot outside or in a sunny location inside, or replanted each year as an annual.

General Information

Scientific name: Bougainvillea spp.
Pronunciation: boog-in-VIL-ee-uh species
Common name(s): Bougainvillea
Family: Nyctaginaceae
Plant type: shrub; ground cover
USDA hardiness zones: 9B 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: specimen; hedge; container or above-ground planter; mass planting; ground cover; trained as a standard; espalier;

Description

hanging basket; cascading down a wall
Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Height: depends upon supporting structure
Spread: 15 to 40 feet
Plant habit: spreading; round

Figure 1. Bougainvillea.
Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Plant density:** moderate  
**Growth rate:** fast  
**Texture:** medium

**Foliage**

- **Leaf arrangement:** alternate  
- **Leaf type:** simple  
- **Leaf margin:** undulate  
- **Leaf shape:** ovate  
- **Leaf venation:** pinnate  
- **Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen  
- **Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches  
- **Leaf color:** variegated  
- **Fall color:** no fall color change  
- **Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

- **Flower color:** purple; red; lavender; yellow  
- **Flower characteristic:** flowers periodically throughout the year

**Fruit**

- **Fruit shape:** elongated  
- **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; can be trained to grow with a short, single trunk; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems  
- **Current year stem/twig color:** brown  
- **Current year stem/twig thickness:** thin

**Culture**

- **Light requirement:** plant grows in full sun  
- **Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; acidic; slightly alkaline; loam  
- **Drought tolerance:** high  
- **Soil salt tolerances:** unknown  
- **Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches
Other

Roots: not applicable  
Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers  
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

Use and Management

Growing best in full sun or light shade on well-drained, acid soils, Bougainvillea can tolerate hot, dry locations fairly well but flowers bountifully in full sun with regular watering. Chlorosis can be a problem in alkaline soil. Regular pruning may be necessary to shape the plant or direct its growth since shoots often grow vigorously, but Bougainvillea tolerates trimming well. These vigorous shoots can stunt growth on the rest of the plant if they are left to develop. Be careful when trimming to avoid injury from the 1 to 2-inch-long thorns. This is generally a low-maintenance plant.

Plants often loose many leaves following a flowering period. This usually preceeds a new growth flush.

Available cultivars include: ‘Barbara Karst’, bright red bracts, vigorous growth; ‘Afterglow’, yellow-orange, heavy bloom, sparse foliage; ‘Hawaii’ (‘Raspberry Ice’), red bloom, leaves have golden yellow margins, is one of the hardiest. Dwarf cultivars include: ‘Crimson Jewel’, combines crimson, pink, and orange; ‘Oo-la-la’, very purple. There is also a cultivar available with variegated foliage, ‘Variegata’. 

*Bougainvillea spectabilis* has purple-red flower bracts, thorny stems, leaves thick, large, and hairy. *Bougainvillea glabra* has smooth leaves, rose-red flower bracts, is less thorny, and is harderier.

Propagation is by seeds or cuttings.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern but occasionally leaf-chewing worms or aphids.

Figure 3. Foliage of Bougainvillea