Justicia carnea
Edward F. Gilman

Introduction

Jacobinia is an upright, evergreen shrub, 3 to 7 feet tall and wide, with large, 6-inch-long, dark green leaves and upwardly-facing plumes of tubular, slightly fragrant flower clusters in rose-purple, red, yellow, orange, apricot, or white (depending on the selection), which appear from early summer until fall (Fig. 1). The plant cycles through 2 to 4 major flowering periods during the year, with few flowers in between. Many stems appear from the center of the plant and rise straight up for several feet before branching. The rapid growth and evergreen nature make Jacobinia ideal for use as a foundation or mass planting, used in various containers, or may even be trained into an attractive espalier. Use it in front of a green shrubbery border to create a color accent throughout the warm months.

General Information

Scientific name: Justicia carnea
Pronunciation: juss-TISH-ee-uh KAR-nee-uh
Common name(s): Jacobinia, Flamingo Plant
Family: Acanthaceae
Plant type: perennial; herbaceous
USDA hardiness zones: 8B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Planting month for zone 8: year round
Planting month for zone 9: year round
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round
Origin: not native to North America

Uses: border; mass planting; container or above-ground planter; cut flowers
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Description

Height: 3 to 6 feet
Spread: 2 to 3 feet
Plant habit: upright; spreading

Figure 1. Jacobinia.

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Plant density:** open  
**Growth rate:** slow  
**Texture:** coarse

**Foliage**

- **Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite  
- **Leaf type:** simple  
- **Leaf margin:** undulate  
- **Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval)  
- **Leaf venation:** pinnate  
- **Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous  
- **Leaf blade length:** 8 to 12 inches  
- **Leaf color:** green  
- **Fall color:** no fall color change  
- **Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

- **Flower color:** white; pink; apricot; yellow; lavender  
- **Flower characteristic:** flowers periodically throughout the year

**Fruit**

- **Fruit shape:** pod or pod-like  
- **Fruit length:** less than .5 inch  
- **Fruit cover:** dry or hard  
- **Fruit color:** brown  
- **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:** green  
- **Current year stem/twig thickness:** very thick

**Culture**

- **Light requirement:** plant grows in the shade  
- **Soil tolerances:** acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay  
- **Drought tolerance:**  
- **Soil salt tolerances:** poor  
- **Plant spacing:** 24 to 36 inches

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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

Use and Management

Rain and irrigation weigh the foliage down and cause the branches to spread out, sometimes touching the ground. This limits height growth and opens up the plant to allow light to enter the interior, stimulating growth from the lower stem and inner branches. It has a place in almost every garden in USDA hardiness zones 8b through 11.

Jacobinia should be grown on rich, well-drained soil which receives ample moisture in a location shaded from full-day sun. Although tender to frost, plants will grow back quickly in springtime in USDA hardiness zones 8 and 9. The only necessary pruning during the growing season should be limited to removal of dead flower heads or occasional pinching to stimulate branching. Since flowers form on new growth, prune early in the spring so flower display is not reduced. This increases the number of branches and flowers and creates an attractive, full plant. Older plants benefit from rejuvenation type pruning where most of the taller stems are cut back to a node close to the ground. If this is performed each year, plants should last for many years.

Propagation is by cuttings.

Nematodes and spider mites. Caterpillars occasionally chew portions of the foliage, but these will not kill the plant.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.