

# BAUHINIA VARIEGATA L.

Fabaceae (Leguminosae)/Pea Family

**Common Names:** Orchid-tree, poor-man's orchid, mountain-ebony, Buddhist bauhinia

**Synonymy:** *Phanera variegata* (L.) Benth.

**Origin:** Eastern Asia (India, China)

**Botanical Description:** Semideciduous tree to 15 m (50 ft) tall, with a spreading crown. Leaves alternate, long petioled (to 3 cm [1.25 in] long), thin-leathery, simple but deeply cleft at apex, forming 2 large rounded lobes; lower surfaces downy, especially at top of petiole; blades with 11-13 veins extending from heart-shaped or rounded base. Flowers showy, fragrant, in few-flowered clusters near stem tips, appearing during leaf fall (early spring); 5 petals, clawed, overlapping, pale magenta to indigo (occasionally white), with dark red and yellow also on upper petal; 5 stamens (rarely 6). Fruit a flat, oblong pod, to 30 cm (1 ft) long, 10-15-seeded.

**NOTE:** May be confused with another naturalized exotic *Bauhinia purpurea* L., which flowers in the fall with leaves on the tree, and has many-flowered clusters, 3 (rarely 4) stamens, and petals not overlapping.

**Ecological Significance:** Introduced into Florida before 1900 (Ledin 1956). Noted as a common escape, abundantly invading disturbed areas in particular (Morton 1976). Noted as occasional across south Florida (Lakela and Wunderlin 1980, Tomlinson 1980, Wunderlin 1982). Naturalized in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the Neotropics as well (Morton 1976, Correll and Correll 1982, Little *et al.* 1974). Spreading from sites where previously planted in Big Cypress National Preserve (T. Pernas, National Park Service, 1996 personal communication). Found in 10 conservation areas in Dade County; displacing native vegetation in hammock margins and occasionally in globally imperiled pine rocklands (R. Hammer, Miami-Dade Parks Department, 1996 personal communication). Reported now from natural areas in four counties: Pinellas, Lee, Dade, and Palm Beach, including the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge and Everglades National Park (EPPC 1996).

**Distribution:** Widely planted in the tropics and warm regions of the world, including the southern margin of the United States from Florida to California; probably also naturalized in Louisiana and perhaps Texas (Isely 1990). In Florida, herbarium specimens deposited from Brevard, Polk, Lee, and Dade counties (Wunderlin *et al.* 1996).

**Life History:** Grows best in full sun or partial shade; propagates easily from seed and by air layering (Hunt 1977). Tolerates a wide range of well-drained soils (Watkins 1970), but prefers acidic soils (Hunt 1977). Not salt tolerant (Watkins 1970), or mildly so (Hunt 1977). May be eliminated from a site by controlled burning (Maithani *et al.* 1986). Flowers in January and February (early spring). A fast-growing tree with seeds that remain viable for more than a year (Morton 1971a).

□



**Flowers**

KAL



**Seedling**