
The Silver Trumpet Tree

by Frederick B. Essig

A few years ago, I wrote an article for *Florida Gardening* on *Tabebuia*, a genus of spectacular flowering trees that liven up the Florida landscape during the winter and spring. Sometimes called trumpet trees, *Tabebuia*s are native to tropical and subtropical parts of the New World.

I have been fascinated by these trees since seeing my first *Tabebuia* one winter in Mexico. One species with pink flowers is common in the deciduous tropical forests along Mexico's west coast, and have the habit of blooming en masse after the

leaves have fallen at the beginning of the dry season.

The one that was missing from my previous article was the silver trumpet tree. I've not seen many blooming specimens in north Tampa, though there are lots of young ones. This tree is quite common in warmer parts of the state, however, and last March I was able to observe many fine blooming specimens in the Sarasota area.

The most distinctive characteristic of this species is its foliage, consisting of leaves with 5 to 7 elongate leaflets covered with silvery scales on the lower surface. (Just the foliage is silvery; the flowers are brilliant yellow). As the tree



photo by Frederick B. Essig

This grizzled old specimen grows on the grounds of the Ringling Estate in Sarasota.

ages, the trunk and branches develop a distinct appearance as well. The trunks develop a thick, furrowed bark, and the branches tend to be gnarled and twisted, signs of a plant native to the drier parts of the tropics.

The current botanical name for this species is *Tabebuia aurea*, though it has been known as *T. argentea*. This name change is the result of the same species having been named twice, with the earlier published name taking precedence.

Whatever it's called, the silver trumpet tree is a delightful component of the Florida landscape. It adds not only color, but also distinctive foliage, limb structure, and bark.



photo by Frederick B. Essig

When tourist season is at its peak, the silver trumpet tree steals the show.

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