

# The Royal Poinciana Tree



Eric Royer Stoner: Flickr.

## Background

This flamboyant tree gets its name from its flower that resembles the colorful tropical plant known as the Poinciana, named after Phillippe de Longvilliers de Poincy, who governed the Caribbean island of St. Kitts in the 17th century. Its botanical name is *Delonix regia*, which comes from two Greek words *delos* (evident or conspicuous) and *onux* (claw), designating the long-clawed petals of the flower. The Latin adjective *regia* means “royal”. It also has many other designations such as Flamboyant Tree, Flame of the Forest, Flame Tree, Fire Tree, Red Tree. Its Indian name, Gulmohar, means Peacock Flower Tree, a combination of two Hindi words, *gul* (flower) and *mohr* (peacock)! The Vietnamese call it the Flower of the Pupil because it flowers at just the time students are getting out of school for the summer. It is the national flower of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in the Pacific and of Puerto Rico and St. Kitts and Nevis in the Caribbean.



## Flora-Facts

**Origin:** It is a native of Madagascar. It was “discovered” by the Bohemian botanist Wenceslaus Bojer in the 1820s growing deep in the forests on the east coast of Madagascar.

**Size:** The mature Royal Poinciana can grow up to 40 ft. tall with a canopy as wide as 60 ft.

**Flowers:** Scarlet or scarlet-orange with a single yellow-white petal topping each flower; they grow in abundant clusters each summer and are sources of red dye.

**Trunk/Leaves:** Smooth-bark, gray trunk with many fan-shaped branches; the fern-like leaves actually close up at night.

**Religious:** The Catholics of Kerala, India cherish a legend that an ancestor of this tree was planted near the Hill of Calvary and the Blood of Christ was shed on it giving the tree its flame red flowers.