

Royal Poinciana – Short-lived Elegance

I love royal poinciana trees. The smooth bark, the way the buttress roots come off the trunk giving them a look of solidity like an old castle wall. Their showiest ***time*** is right now while they bloom. In some neighborhoods, whole blocks are covered in brilliant vibrant orange flowers. This lovely tree is planted all over south Florida and has been installed as a statement tree in yards for at least the last 50 years. I remember individual trees in my neighborhood and friends yards growing up. Nowadays as an arborist, mentioning the poinciana in a group invariably inspires someone to talk about one they have, or love, or loved growing up. They are a big part of our local landscape but they do have some issues.

After central air conditioning became the norm in new homes in the 1960s, South Florida had a real building boom. South Miami, North Miami, Kendall, the areas now incorporated as Pinecrest, Palmetto Bay and Cutler Bay. All ***those*** new homes and neighborhoods, and many builders loved to crown their landscapes with a magnificent Royal Poinciana.

Known as the flamboyant tree, flame tree or royal poinciana (*Delonix regia*) serves a great purpose when installed locally. They grow quickly, creating an ***incredible*** canopy. They are showy and provide nesting for birds and squirrels. They like our soil and don't require much fertilizer. If left untrimmed, their canopy will grow to droop to the ground, in season creating a brilliant display that is really incomparable to anything else in the local garden.

Here is the downside: Royal Poinciana don't live forever. They grow big and fast and beautiful but, these southern softwoods don't compartmentalize disease well, they tend to included bark flaws and they generally have a lifespan of 50-60 years. Here is where the points above intersect. All the really big poinciana trees around town were planted 50-70 years ago during the 1960s and 1970s building boom. At least once a month I get a call to come **see** a giant old poinciana that split apart and crushed a car or a house or is blocking a street. Thousands of these trees are still in yards and need to get checked by a professional. An ISA certified arborist is the only professional qualified to assess your trees for risk. If you have a big poinciana with a pocket that holds water, or an old cut that leads to a hollow you can see, its time to get it checked. Call me or another certified arborist and makes sure your tree is safe.