

A favourite among horticulturists

Allamanda, also known as Golden Trumpet and Yellow Bell, is a very popular flowering shrub suitable for open areas in a garden. It is fast growing, easy to grow and maintain, and adds colour to any landscape in no time, says **N. CHANDRAMOHAN REDDY**

They are few in species, but versatile in form. Grown as flowerbeds, ground covers, garden hedges, container plants, and climbing shrubs, the beautiful Allamandas are loved by all horticulturists.

With flowers resembling 'trumpets' and 'bells', they could create an acoustic imagery in garden!

Allamanda, also known as Golden Trumpet and Yellow Bell is a very popular flowering shrub suitable for open areas in a garden.

It is fast growing, easy to grow and maintain, and adds colour to any landscape in no time. With almost year-long production of flowers in striking hues, Allamanda is a favourite choice of many gardeners and landscapers throughout the warm regions of the world.

There are about 15 species of *Allamanda*, which are native to South and Central America. Out of these, Golden trumpet (*Allamanda cathartica*), Violet Allamanda (*Allamanda blanchetii* syn. *A. violacea*), Bush Allamanda (*Allamanda schottii*) and many cultivars of these three are popular in horticultural trade.

Characteristics

Allamanda is an evergreen, vigorous, perennial, woody compact shrub or creeping shrub.

The creeping varieties also climb a few meters on a support. Stems contain milky sap. Leathery, yellow-green to dark green leaves grow in whorls of two or four. They are lance-shaped or egg-shaped (ovoid). Flowers are bright, trumpet-shaped, large, fragrant, and in yellow, white, cream, pink, or orange colours based on the species or cultivar. They are composed of five broad overlapping petals that spread outwardly. There are both single and double flower forms.

Clusters of flowers appear at the tip of new shoots or in the leaf axils. Allamanda blooms mainly during summer and monsoon.

Gardening

With their varied forms, different species and cultivars of Allamanda can be used for various purposes, as flowerbed, for ground cover, as hedge, in containers, or as climbing shrub to be trained on low walls, and trellises. Since Allamanda is light-demanding plant, it may be

▶ The genus *Allamanda* is named in honour of the 18th century Swiss physician and botanist Dr. Frederic - Louis Allamand.

▶ While pruning the plants, care must be taken as the sap that exudes from the plants may cause skin and eye irritation. It is better to wear gloves while pruning.

▶ Recently new cultivars of Allamanda have been developed in horticulture trade. 'Cherry Jubilee' with dark purple flowers is one such, which has become one of the most popular garden creepers. 'Grandiflora' produces very large yellow flowers. A rare hybrid 'Alba' or 'Blanca' is developed with white flowers. 'Hendersonii' has yellow flowers with white or orange markings in the throat and bronze-tinted buds. The double-flower variety is called 'FlorePleno'. 'Golden Butterfly' has long tubular flowers whose petals flap in the wind like butterflies. 'Halley's Comet' has both double and semi-double flowers.

GREEN MATTERS

planted only in open places where plenty of sunlight is available.

They grow well in slightly acidic soils with good drainage.

Since these plants require good amount of water during the growing period, they can bloom heavily even in the lawn areas, where enough moisture is available.

Stems are very flexible and are easy to weave through a trellis. Soft plant-ties can be used to hold each stem in place. Tie them loosely so that the growth is not restricted, and re-tie stems as they grow.

Care & maintenance

Regular and deep watering is needed for the plants, allowing the soil to dry slightly between waterings (but total dry soil will cause premature flower drop).

Continue watering as long as the plants are in blooms, but when flowering is finished during the early winter, keep them on the dry side until spring, allowing them to rest during the winter months.

Apply a balanced liquid fertilizer once in a month during the growing season and resume fertilization during April as the plant starts growing.

Pruning

Because of their rapid growth, Allamanda plants require pruning frequently. Plants can be cut back to a third in the spring just before the growth resumes, to have more flowering. Prune back

hard in the spring to improve the shape and encourage heavy flowering.

For the plants where Allamanda is used as hedge, continuous pruning is required to maintain the shape and compactness.

Pests & problems

Though Allamanda plants are very hardy, insect pests like mealy-bugs, aphids, whiteflies, scales, and spider-mites may cause problems. The plants are susceptible to root-rot when overwatered during winter or planted under shade.

Watch for the symptoms of these pests and treat the infestation immediately with normal pest management practices.

Propagation

Allamanda plants can easily be propagated by stem-tip cuttings during late spring. Clip four to five inches of semi-hard stem cuttings from fresh growth.

They should have at least three or four fully formed leaves at the tip. Make a diagonal cut at both the ends of the cuttings. Remove leaves and buds from the lower half and dip the cuttings in rooting powder.

Insert them in porous soil (either in a bed or in a container) and water enough to evenly moisten the surface of the soil.

Place them in a humid, warm, brightly lit area away from direct sunlight. The cuttings will root within two to four weeks, and be ready for transplanting.

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STRIKING HUES: A wide variety of Allamandas in full bloom. - PHOTOS: N. CHANDRAMOHAN REDDY

Minimalist but magnificent

Sleeker versions of staircases have come up with the use of glass, steel and plywood

The moment you step inside a house you don't spot it but it is always a favourite showpiece. It is the staircase.

Huge, pompous and ornate, the staircase symbolised architectural grandeur once. Only the rich and the famous owned multi-storey houses and the indoor staircase was a statement of splendour.

Not any more. The grand old staircase has now given way to trimmer and sleeker versions that merge with the setting. With the minimalist trend in modern architecture, staircases look stylish not by their size but by their design and choice of material.

"There has been a paradigm shift in the very design concept. They are no more heavy and huge but very light and space-efficient. In other words, staircases have now become part of the whole architectural scheme rather than a dominant feature of a house," K.B. Jayakrishnan, architect, JCJR Partnership, says. What makes it light is the kind of material used. Traditional staircase construction materials such as wood, bricks and concrete are now being replaced by glass, steel and plywood. Spiral and curvaceous stairways with elaborate designs, carvings and woodwork on the tread and balustrades have now been replaced by minimalist straight-line designs.

Chic designs

"A staircase basically consists of three elements: the tread, which is the stair plank used to step on; the riser, which is the vertical portion



FUNCTIONAL DESIGNS: Wooden stairs in a house.

between two treads; and the hand-rail. Glass is being increasingly used for all these three elements," B. Sudhir, chief architect of Architects Consortium, says.

As it gives a contemporary look often, glass is used in combination

with other materials such as wood and metal. "The use of glass in these types of staircases can give a distorted visual perception creating an illusion of space especially when used for riser-less stair designs. Also the hard and heavy

wooden handrails have given way to chic designs of steel rod handrails and beaded handrails," Mr. Sudhir says. "The roof right above the staircase is ideal for a skylight, while the outer wall against which the stairs are constructed can be

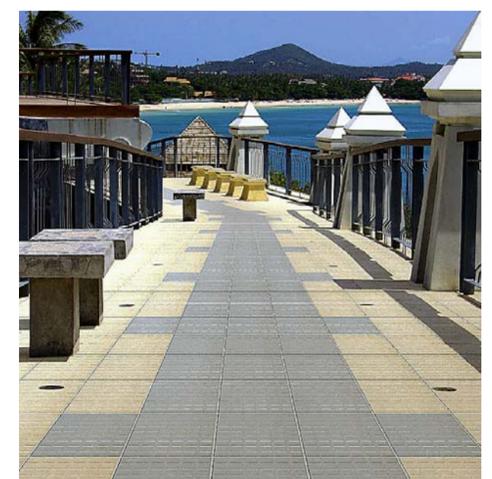
used as a ventilation device. Since this will be a double height wall, there is a lot of scope for highlighting it. It can be given interesting ventilation designs such as window and air-holes fit with stained glass or even without any glass," Mr. Sudhir says. In many modern homes, the walls around the staircases have been converted into a hall of fame on which memorabilia of personal and professional achievements are hung, or as a memory wall covered with family photographs. The middle landings are increasingly being used as a utility space.

Mr. Jayakrishnan says that with some smart designing, the intermediate landing or platform can be converted into a cosy family space or study area. "The middle landing is, in fact, a commanding position as it can be a vantage point from where you can have a view of both the upper and lower floor levels. It can be used as a reading room, study-cum-library or music room or even a family lounge. I have also incorporated balconies in this space in some of my designs," Mr. Jayakrishnan says.

The use of the stair spandrel (the space beneath the stairs) as a closet or storing area is common. But nowadays, the space beneath the stairs is being made into a garden or play area. "The staircase is now more of a private space. These changes have come with the change in lifestyle. People prefer privacy in their movements," Mr Sudhir says.

SANGEETHA UNNITHAN

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sistant, neutral to sun's UV effect, stain resistant, fire resistant and has a high degree of acid/alkali resistance. This makes Super Grip an ideal choice for floorings of automobile service centres, chemical laboratories, super markets, educational institutes, parking areas, pool side places, terrace and porches. Available in 16 versatile designs it costs Rs 49 per sq. ft. It is available at all House of Johnson Modern retail stores.