

# Ixora: The flame of the garden

With their perpetual bright inflorescences and glossy green foliage Ixoras are popular throughout the world, writes **N. CHANDRAMOHAN REDDY**

Reaching for stars is literally impossible. Nor can stars descend from heavens for us mortals. However, if one wants to have an illusion of stars brightening up one's garden, one should go for Ixoras, the multi-coloured star-shaped blooms that have heavenly connotations to their name.

*Ixora* is a large genus of about 400 species of popular evergreen shrubs and small trees, many of which are native to southern China, India and Sri Lanka and belong to the taxonomic family Rubiaceae. A few of these species are grown in gardens for their vibrantly coloured flowers produced in large clusters at the tips of branches. Various species of *Ixora* are otherwise called as West Indian Jasmine, Jungle Flame, Flame of the World, Jungle Geranium etc., but are very popular by the genus name, *Ixora*.

About 28 species are cultivated worldwide and out of these, *Ixora chinensis* and *Ixora coccinea* have great horticulture importance. The *Ixora* hybrids, which are crosses between the species, and cultivated varieties (Cultivars) account for the majority of *Ixora* plants used in gardens.

## Characteristics

*Ixora* is a compact, multi-branched evergreen shrub or small tree, commonly 4 to 6 feet in height, but can reach up to 12 feet high. Leaves are glossy, leathery, oblong, about 4 to 6 inches long, and are arranged in opposite pairs.

Star shaped flowers appear in round bunches at the tips of new stems. These flower heads can grow to 4 to 8 inches in diameter, and are scattered throughout the plant. The flowers may vary in colour from red to pink, orange, yellow, cream and white, according to the species and cultivar. Flowers are often fragrant.

Each floret usually has four petals arranged like a cross. It has about two inch long tubular throat. Flowers appear almost year round, especially during warm period. Each flower cluster can last for four to eight weeks.

## Gardening

With their perpetual bright inflorescences, glossy green foliage, versatility in use and being easy to grow, Ixoras are popular garden shrubs throughout the world. They can be used in hedges, in shrub beds, as ground covers or as specimen plants. Large varieties can also be used for screening. Dwarf varieties are grown in pots and can be trained as compact hedge. They are commonly planted near house walls in large shrub beds.

Ixoras produce maximum numbers of flower clusters when grown in bright light. However, they can tolerate partial shade.

*Ixora* flowers last well when picked and put into a

- The name *Ixora* is said to have derived from 'Iswara' which is a title of the Malabar deity to whom the plant is sacred or probably from the Sanskrit word 'Iswara' which means god
- *Ixora pavetta* (*Ixora arborea*) is a common evergreen tree species from dry forests of India. It gives large spiky heads of white flowers at the ends of the branches making a strong visual impact and sweet fragrance during the hot months. The woody branches of this species can be lit while green and used as torch during dark nights and hence the common name 'Torch Wood'

## Some popular Ixoras used in gardens

Name of the species / cultivar	Flower colour
<i>Ixora chinensis</i> (Chinese Ixora)	Orange-red
<i>Ixora coccinea</i> (Jungle Geranium)	Bright orange-red
<i>Ixora casei</i> ( <i>I. duffii</i> )	Orange-red
<i>Ixora coccinea</i> var. <i>rosea</i>	Rose-pink
<i>Ixora chinensis</i> 'Alba'	White
<i>Ixora chinensis</i> 'Lutea'	Light yellow
<i>Ixora chinensis</i> 'Sunset'	Yellow-orange
<i>Ixora coccinea</i> 'Siamensis'	Red
<i>Ixora coccinea</i> 'Yellow Dwarf'	Yellow
<i>Ixora coccinea</i> 'Nora Grant'	Pinkish red
<i>Ixora</i> 'Candy pink'	Bright rose-pink
<i>Ixora</i> 'Maui'	Deep orange-red
<i>Ixora</i> 'Petite' (Dwarf varieties)	Red, pink, yellow and orange
<i>Ixora</i> 'Singapore Yellow'	Yellow
<i>Ixora</i> 'Sunkist' (Dwarf variety)	Orange, red, white, pink
<i>Ixora</i> 'Super King'	Orange-red



**MULTIFACETED:** *Ixora* can be grown in hedges, in shrub beds, as ground covers or as specimen plants. - PHOTOS: N. CHANDRAMOHAN REDDY

## GREEN MATTERS

vase or bowl with water, making an attractive flower display.

## Care and maintenance

*Ixora* plants prefer well drained, slightly acidic soils rich in humus, plenty of water and warm climate for optimum growth. Copious amounts of organic manure and mulch can be added to the plants for better growth and blooms.

*Ixoras* are very sensitive to drying out and should be watered regularly and thoroughly, but care should be taken not to over water. Regular watering will ensure that roots

will grow deeply and can be protected from drought. Watering shall be minimised during winter.

Regular application of fertilizer helps in the formation of new flower buds. Since flowers appear on the new shoots, encouraging new growth will promote more blooms. Supplemental feeding with a water-soluble fertilizer can be done throughout the growing season.

If exposed to direct sunlight for full day, especially during hot summer, the leaves may burn and dry and the flowers also may have burnt edges.

So, partial shade shall be provided to get a few hours of direct sunlight, either morn-

ing or evening.

*Ixora* plants require light pruning to maintain the shape and promote flowering. They shall be pruned regularly to allow sunlight to reach the younger branches at the bottom of the plant.

Attention is needed while cutting and trimming the plants. Do not cut the plant so much that it looks barren. Always trim edges of side branches and let the plant develop new shoots. Spring is the best season for trimming.

## Pests & problems

*Ixoras* growing in calcareous sandy soils are highly susceptible to a reddish leaf-spot disorder. They are very sensitive to Phosphorus, Potassium, Iron, Manganese and

Magnesium deficiencies resulting in leaves developing yellowed areas between the veins.

Like many tropical plants, *Ixoras* are susceptible to mealy bugs, scale insects, aphids, spider mites and nematodes.

These problems can be overcome with normal pest and fertilizer management practices. Supplemental feeding, good drainage, optimum light and addition of organic manure will solve most of the problems.

## Propagation

*Ixoras* can be propagated through stem cuttings, layering and grafting. Most of the cultivars and hybrids will not set the seeds.



# Beautify your living spaces with stunning designs in tiles



**STYLE STATEMENT:** Tiles add visual appeal and glamour to spaces.

The best way to keep your home intact against general wear and tear of flooring and walls this monsoon is to opt for wall and floor tiles

The arrival of monsoon is truly exhilarating but the damp walls, leaking roofs and shabby exteriors that accompany the season leave home-owners unhappy.

Damp walls with paint peeling off are surely unsightly and the least said about wallpapers is better as the material gets soggy if the walls are damp, giving a shoddy look.

The best way to keep your home intact against the general attrition of flooring and walls this monsoon is to opt for wall and floor tiles. They are not only durable but also retain colour and textural intensities keeping the wear and tear to the minimum.

With a realistic view of beautifying your spaces, wall tiles offer a lot more than the regular paint. Multiple laying patterns of the same product give a stunning design combinations. Also, wall tiles are easy to clean with negligi-

ble maintenance cost. Tiles with natural finish are the ones to look out for this season. These tiles add instant glamour and panache to any space. Marble finish has been a favourite floor cover for long but this has been reinvented with Italian marble finishes. Wood and bamboo finishes give warmth and charming character to the space.

Stone finish is edgy and bold and make a classic statement. The new range that has been created using innovative digital printing provides enthralling natural material finishes. As elegant as natural materials, tiled floors are easier to lay, look more fashionable and are quite sustainable.

Tiles add visual appeal and add glamour to your space. Available in unlimited options with astonishing colours and patterns, they not only help to break the monotony of your

space but also give a contemporary look to your house. All these tiles are easily available and at reasonable prices.

Another great product option is the germ-free tiles. Manufactured by using the anti-bacterial technology which kills the germs, these tiles give you a hygienic environment. They significantly cut some of the most polluting agents present in the air and also reduce the odour in the air. By laying the anti-bacterial tiles, one does not need to rely completely upon anti germ cleaners. This technology allows the ceramic material to be treated as active principle that boasts anti-bacterial properties that are able to reduce pollution and nitrogen oxide present in the atmosphere.

The germ-free tiles eliminate the risk of live microbial organisms in your space. This tile is an extremely important asset

in maintaining hygiene, hence makes a substantial contribution in creating a better atmosphere and a cleaner environment. These tiles are ideal for various interior applications like homes, hotels, hospitals, departmental stores, and other residential and commercial complexes, as the manufacturing material used is ceramic but the composition in glaze inhibits the growth of bacteria.

These days, tiles play a vital role in home décor. Complimenting this season and opting for tiles – be it floor or wall tiles, one can very much enhance the visual aspect of home. Tiles now appear in larger sizes too and this will just get better and modern with time.

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## Asia's first pit-less autowalk

KONE Elevators has installed the first pit-less autowalk in Asia in the upcoming integrated Terminal 2 at Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport (CSIA) in Mumbai. According to a press release, it is the world's flattest autowalk technology and makes designing locations for and installing autowalks considerably easier. Due to the innovative pallet return mechanism and a new kind of motor solution, each KONE InnoTrack autowalk is so flat that, unlike conventional solutions, it can be installed entirely on the finished floor level. It is a breakthrough innovation in the escalator business and means that autowalks can now be installed in other premises and locations as well. The technology is also environment-friendly because of its oil-free drive system and the fact that it uses significantly less material than traditional solutions. CSIA, Mumbai was rated the third best airport in the world and the second best in India in 2011 by ACI in the 25-40 million passenger capacity.