

# Hibiscus

## Hibiscus

Amapola (Spanish)

Family: Malvaceae

Genus: Hibiscus



### Distribution

Originally native to tropical Asia it is now grows throughout warm-temperate, subtropical and tropical regions throughout the world.

### Habitat

Hibiscus is easily grown over a wide range of conditions. Their diverse habitats range from wetlands to savannahs and woodlands.

### Description

The genus includes both annual and perennial herbaceous plants, as well as woody shrubs and small trees. Height varies from less than 30 cm tall to about 12 metres. They are well known for their very colourful flowers.

There are many different species of Hibiscus around the world. They have been in cultivation for hundreds of years... Today, there are thousands of known cultivars. Many are hybrids. New types are still being discovered, bred and recorded on a global basis.

In some areas hibiscus are grown as landscape plants and as hedges. In the tropics it readily escapes from gardens into surrounding areas. They are among the most popular garden plants. Some species grow in the temperate zones of Canada. Others make excellent container plants and can be placed outside for the summer months in Ontario. They are also very popular as houseplants.

Flowers vary in size. In some some species they are quite large and conspicuous. Many are trumpet shaped. with five or more petals, ranging from white to pink, red, orange, purple, or yellow. Flowers are solitary, in upper leaf axils near the ends of branches. The flowers are single, but some cultivars have double flowers. Size varies from 15 to 25 cm across, depending on the cultivar. Leaves are alternate, oval to elliptic with a pointed tip and a toothed or lobed margin. The sap is mucilaginous. The fruit is a dry five-lobed capsule containing several seeds in each lobe. Seeds are released when the capsule splits open at maturity.



### Adaptations

Propagation of hibiscus can be made through cuttings or grafting, or by germinating the seeds.

### Animal Connections

The large colourful flowers attract many pollinators such as butterflies and bees.

### Economic Value

Globally hibiscus plants provide important ecological, aesthetic, culinary, and medicinal values to mankind. Humans around the world use the flowers, leaves, roots, and bark in a variety of ways.

### Interesting Facts

The red hibiscus flower is traditionally worn by Tahitian women. A single flower, tucked behind the right ear, indicates the wearer's availability for marriage.

The Chinese hibiscus, *H. sinensis*, is the national flower of Malaysia, and the Rose of Sharon, *H. syriacus* is the national flower of South Korea.

In India, the flowers and leaves are used to make hair care products. The leaves make an excellent shampoo.

### Cano Palma

Hibiscus has been developed to have many different features, including double flowers and variegated leaves. Chinese hibiscus, *H. rosa-sinensis*, has large yellow pollen that can be seen with the naked eye. The pollen sacs are closed when the bloom opens in the morning, but will open as the day progresses to release their pollen. This facilitates cross pollination and hybridization.

A great variety of animals feed on both the foliage and flowers. These include deer and iguanas. They are used as food plants by many insects. Birds are attracted to the flowers.

All parts of hibiscus are useful medicinally. Flower extract is used in many folk remedies. The fruit, leaves and bark are used to cure a wide variety of ailments. It has many culinary purposes. In food preparation various parts of the plant are used to make jams, spices, soups, and sauces. It is a primary ingredient in many herbal teas. They have considerable economic value as ornamental plants.

The bark contains strong fibers and is used in paper making in some countries.

The flowers can be used to polish shoes.

Children in the Philippines crush the leaves and flowers until a sticky juice emerges which can be used for blowing bubbles.

In Jamaica, Trinidad and many other islands in the Caribbean, a tea is made from the flowers of *Hibiscus sabdariffa*, not to be confused with *Rumex acetosa*, a species sharing the common name sorrel.

Certain species of hibiscus are beginning to be used more widely as a natural source of food colouring.

It is not an uncommon sight in neighbouring areas where it has been planted to enhance landscaping.

