

Tropical Hawaiian Flowers: the Heliconia Plant

Posted on [July 23, 2019](#) by [Leslie Lang](#)

When you visit Hawaii Tropical Botanical Garden, you'll notice the showy, brilliantly colored flowers called heliconia. Heliconia are exotic and dramatic, and they scream TROPICS! The Garden has an excellent collection of species and hybrid heliconia and you'll see them on every trail.



Some, like the hanging lobster claw, are pendant, and others have standing inflorescence bracts. Their inflorescence bracts, either smooth or fuzzy, have up to small 50 flowers each. The flowers are often bright red, yellow, or both, although some are orange, green, purple, and pink.

There are about 200 species of heliconia (all of the genus *Heliconia*; family Heliconiaceae), some from the Pacific Islands as far west as Indonesia, and others that are native to tropical America.

It was the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus, known as the “father of modern taxonomy,” who named the genus *Heliconia* in 1771. The name is after Helicon, a mountain in Greece that is home to Apollo and the Muses.

In the past, heliconia were classified as part of the banana family (Musaceae), but while their leaves and shape do somewhat resemble that family (and also the bird of paradise, Strelitziaceae), they have very different flowers.



Depending on the species, heliconia can grow up to 30 feet tall and their leaves range from six inches to 10 feet long. There are three basic kinds of leaf arrangement:

Upright with long petioles (like how a banana plant grows)

Generally horizontal with short petioles (as a ginger plant grows)

Oblique blades with short to medium-length petioles (similar to those in the genus *Canna*).

Various birds and animals make use of the heliconia. Some attach their nests to a strip of leaf torn away from the blade, so the leaf makes an overhang. Spiders and frogs hide within the heliconia's furled leaves, and tiny aquatic organisms, including mosquito larvae, live in the water that collects in the bracts.

Want to grow heliconia yourself? The plant prefers full sun to partial shade and does best in humidity and warm

temperatures. It does not do well in cold temperatures.

When you cut the flowers, wash them with a little dish detergent and rinse them with fresh water before putting them in a flower arrangement. If you soak them in fresh water for about 30 minutes every three days, they will keep longer.



This entry was posted in [Heliconiaceae](#) and tagged [Heliconia](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

* Name

* Email

Comment

HTML tags are not allowed.

Post Comment

Security Question:

What is $12 + 12$?

IMPORTANT! To be able to proceed, you need to solve the following simple math (so we know that you are a human) :-)