

REMARKABLE TREES ON NII CAMPUS

1. The lilac-blue wonder

Common name: Jacaranda, Fern tree Botanical

Name: *Jacaranda mimosifolia* D. Don

Family: Jacaranda Family (Bignoniaceae)

Where to See: Director's bungalow, M and G Blocks



Jacaranda in full bloom (Photograph sourced from http://texastreeplanting.tamu.edu/Display_Onetree.aspx?tid=39)



A tree near the Director's bungalow (Photo courtesy: Dr Chandrima Shaha)

You would not have failed to notice these days a medium-sized tree on our campus that is putting out one of the most spectacular floral displays of any tropical tree. This is the Jacaranda, cultivated for its bluish-lilac ornamental flowers.

The genus *Jacaranda* has 49 species and is native to tropical and subtropical regions of Central America, South America, Cuba, Hispaniola and the Bahamas. However, it has been carried to all parts of the world and is popular as an avenue tree from South Africa to Australia. The city of Grafton in New South Wales, Australia for example, has been holding the annual Jacaranda Festival since 1934 to celebrate the spectacle of hundreds of lilac-blossomed trees lining its streets. The 80th event is being hosted this year during 18 October and 2 November. Featured events include a Jacaranda Ball, Jacaranda Queen Contest, procession of floats, and Jacaranda Fun Run, among others. Pretoria, South Africa is known as 'Jacaranda City' because of over 70,000+ flowering Jacaranda trees planted in its streets.



Among the events at the Grafton Festival is a contest to select the Jacaranda Queen (Picture credit <http://agent-lee.blogspot.in/2011/04/purple-reign-by-corrie-bond.html>).

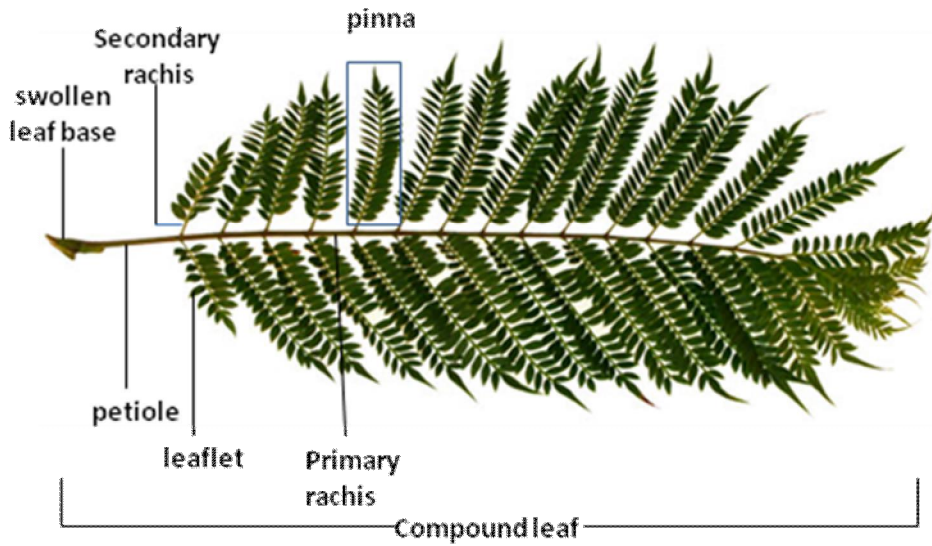


Revellers at the 2013 Grafton Festival (Picture credit http://www.jacarandafestival.org.au/images/photo_gallery/2011%20Jacaranda%20Thursday%20photos/images/large/_8613110748.jpg).

The species common in India is *Jacaranda mimosifolia*. It was first introduced in the Indian Botanic Garden (now renamed Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Indian Botanic Garden), Kolkata in 1841 from Brazil. The name 'jacaranda' is of Guarani (national language of Paraguay) origin, meaning 'fragrant'.

The tree attains a height of 25'-50' with a spreading, arching crown. However, most of the trees in Delhi are a bit stunted. The bark is thin, grey-brown, smooth when young, turning scaly in older trees.

The foliage is feather-like and the leaves bear a resemblance to those of the mimosa, hence the specific epithet *mimosifolia*. The leaves are shed in December-January and new leaves start appearing in April along with the flowers.



The leaves are shed in late December-early January and reappear in early April along with the flowers. The leaf is compound, feather-like, twice divided and made of 9 to 16 20-22 pairs of pinnae along the rachis. Each pinna has 13-20 pairs of leaflets.

The lavender blue flowers appear in showy profusion covering the tree in bloom during early April to mid May in dense terminal clusters, forming pools of blue on the ground as they fall. Each flower is tubular, slightly bent with two distinct lips - the upper lip being bi-lobed and the lower lip 3-lobed. Inside, there are four fertile stamens and a sterile stamen.



Jacaranda flowers have a distinct fragrance. In fact, the meaning of the word 'jacaranda' refers to this feature. The tree erupts in a blaze of brilliant lavender or purple blue during early April to mid May in dense terminal clusters.

It is said that if you are walking underneath the Jacaranda tree and one of the blossoms falls on your head, you will be favoured by fortune.



Each flower is trumpet-shaped and bi-lipped. the upper lip has two lobes and the lower lip has three. The inside of the trumpet is white and downy.



Fruits start appearing on the tree by June and remain till next February. The pods are flat, round, brownish and woody (top left). They contain numerous seeds that are released when they split open (top right). The seed is thin and winged.



Jacaranda tree growing near M Block