



Tropical Hydrangea *Dombeya wallichii*

By Kathie Carter
Cooperative Extension/ Botany and Plant Sciences Department
University California Riverside



Introduction: [*Dombeya wallichii*](#) - pronunciation: dom-BEE-yuh wall-ICK-ee-eye is commonly known as Pink Ball Tree because of the fragrant, showy, clusters of pink ball flowers that hang from the branches during the fall and winter. The flower balls can be 4 - 6 inches across. This is a fast growing small- to medium-size tree or large shrub with attractive large heart shaped velvety leaves.

As a tree it can grow from 15-30 feet in height but it can be kept smaller with judicious trimming. The spread can be equal to the height. When the flowers fade, they don't fall off but remain on the plant, first fading to pale pink then light brown.

Dombeya wallichii does not lose its leaves in the winter. It performs best in full sun or partial shade with moderate water during the growing season. This is a very showy plant for the winter months since the large pink ball blossoms last for months starting at the beginning of the year.

History: *Dombeya wallichii* originates from India, East Africa and Madagascar. The genus *Dombeya* is named after Joseph Dombey, an 18th-century French botanist, doctor, and explorer.

Varieties: *Dombeya wallichii* and a hybrid of *D. wallichii* crossed with *D. burgesiae* that is called *Dombeya. x cayeuxii* are often confused as *D. wallichii*. The two are very similar but differ in that *D. x cayeuxii* has three lobed leaves.

Landscape Use and Planting: It is used primarily as a specimen plant for its large, showy, winter flowers and attractive foliage. The roots are not invasive, so it can be planted close to a building or in a patio.

General Care: *Dombeya wallichii* is very low maintenance. It is a vigorous grower but needs protection from heavy frost and temperatures below freezing. After a light frost the leaves take on a bronze color. The plant grows best with regular weekly or bi-weekly water in summer once it is established. It is reported to be somewhat drought tolerant. It is not salt tolerant and may need occasional deep watering to flush away the salts in years when winter rainfall is below normal.

Fertilize plants shortly after transplanting with a water soluble product according to the label directions. Once established, the plants are very easy to grow and do not need a regular fertilization.

Pruning this tree or shrub should be done immediately after the flowers are gone and before it completes its summer growth. The best time is usually in the spring to mid-summer. It can be pruned as much as necessary to maintain the size and shape desired. In the winter months you can trim off the flowers that have turned a light brown to keep the plant's appearance looking neat and beautiful.

These plants occasionally get [aphids](#) that may need to be controlled, but it is overall disease free.

Propagation: The Plant can be propagated by softwood cuttings which root quickly and easily.

Bibliography:

1. www.bio.miami.edu/arboretum/Dombeya.html link checked April 24, 2009.
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3. Gilman, E. F. and Watson, D.G. Florida; <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ST232> link checked April 24, 2009.
4. Wyman, D. 1977. Wyman's Gardening Encyclopedia. New York: MacMillan Publishing.

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