



San Diego Zoo

Botanical Tours



Coral Trees

This tour begins near the entrance to the Zoofari Party Area and continues across the Front Plaza to the entrance of Reptile Walk, then proceeds through Reptile Walk, ending near the Children's Zoo.



1. Coral Tree

Erythrina steyermarkii

This species is native to Costa Rica and Nicaragua and was named in honor of Julian A. Steyermark for his research in tropical American botany. Coral trees belong to the *Fabaceae* or pea family and *Erythrina* comes from the Greek word “erythros” which means red, referring to red flowers common to this genus.

Fun Fact

This tree is famous; it was mentioned in a prestigious botanical publication as an outstanding specimen.



2. Shrub Coral Tree

Erythrina x bidwillii

This small, deciduous tree or shrub is a hybrid of *E. herbacea* x *E. crista-galli* and was first crossed by William Macarthur in the early 1840s at Camden Park in Australia. It begins flowering in May and continues to bloom all summer, with long, deep red, pendulous inflorescences.

Fun Fact

Coral trees from all over the world were brought to California as early as 1853 as landscape trees. Our earliest Zoo records date back to an *E. coralloides* on grounds in 1935.



3. Coral Tree

Erythrina tajumulcensis

The pinkish-red flowers of this species are unusually long and narrow, and stand out among the foliage. There are around 130 species of *Erythrina*, 68 of which are found in the Americas. Hummingbirds are the primary pollinators of coral trees in the Americas.

Fun Fact

This species was first described in 1970 from the slopes of the volcano Tajumulco, near the northern border of Guatemala.



4. Coral Tree

Erythrina macrophylla

This Central American species has tubular red flowers that bloom in spring and summer. All coral tree flowers have a large petal at the top called the banner or standard, two lateral petals called wings, and two lower petals that are typically fused to form a keel.

Fun Fact

Flower structure and fruit characteristics that are often used by botanists to distinguish one species from another. This species has keel petals are rounded rather than pointed at the tip.



5. Coral Bean Tree

Erythrina corallodendron

This species is native to the West Indies, though this individual was propagated from cuttings of a tree at the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens.

Fun Fact

Not all coral trees are large trees. Some, like this species, grow as shrubs or short trees.



6. Bucaré Ceibo

Erythrina poeppigiana

These orange-red flowers are more upright and open shaped, suitable for a perching bird. This species is native to Central and South America, where it's widely grown on coffee and cocoa plantations as a shade tree and because of its ability to fix nitrogen in the soil.

Fun Fact

Through our DNA barcoding research, we've learned this is one of the oldest species of *Erythrina*.



7. Guatemala Coral Tree

Erythrina guatemalensis

As the name suggests, this species is endemic to Guatemala. The showy inflorescences stand above the foliage and have a coarser, bolder look to them than other species in the Americas.

Fun Fact

Some trees in the San Diego Zoo are moved when new habitats are built. This particular tree was relocated from Urban Jungle for the building of Australian Outback.



8. Brazilian Coral Tree

Erythrina falcata

The very rough bark of this species supports various orchid and air plants in their native South American habitat. The blooms are showy, drooping racemes of dark red flowers that appear from April through June.

Fun Fact

This species is very susceptible to the *Erythrina* stem borer, which lays eggs where the leaf meets the stem. The emerging larvae burrow into the leaf base, killing the stem tips.



9. Coral Tree

Erythrina x sykesii

This sterile hybrid originated in New Zealand and is common throughout the Zoo grounds, blooming profusely throughout the winter and spring. The quick-growing tree propagates easily from cuttings and is hardy to around 20 degrees F.

Fun Fact

Its parents are not known from literature; however, our DNA barcoding work shows that this species' closest relative is *Erythrina speciosa*.



10. Cardinal Spear

Erythrina herbacea f. *albiflora*

Although most coral trees have red blooms, this form bears white flowers. This species is found from North Carolina to Florida and west to Texas and Mexico.

Fun Fact

This is one of only three coral trees native to the US. *E. flabelliformis* is found in southern Arizona, southwest New Mexico, and northern Mexico. *E. sandwicensis* is native to Hawaii.



11. Naked Coral Tree

Erythrina coralloides 'Bicolor'

This tree bears both white and red inflorescences and in mixed combinations of each color in the early spring, when the tree is leafless. The species is native to eastern Mexico.

Fun Fact

Coral trees are members of the pea family, *Fabaceae*, which is the third-largest flowering plant family.



12. Southwest Coral Bean

Erythrina flabelliformis

The southwest coral bean is found in Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of Mexico. This shrubby plant is deciduous and can withstand temperatures down to 26 degrees F. The brilliant red flowers and leaves emerge in the spring after winter rains.

Fun Fact

Coral trees contain numerous alkaloids in all parts of the plant, including the seeds. Scientists continue to study and identify new alkaloids that may be useful in future medicines and treatments.



13. Cock's-spur

Erythrina eggersii

This endangered shrub is native to Puerto Rico, and the British and US Virgin Islands. It is found in small patches of dry forest, where it is threatened by habitat loss and predation by feral goats. It also is affected by the *Erythrina* gall wasp, an invasive species.

Fun Fact

The San Diego Zoo received its first cock's-spur branch cutting in 2001 from Waimea Valley on Oahu, Hawaii.



14. Coral Tree

Erythrina elenae

Native only to Cuba, this species is extremely rare and listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. It reaches 30 feet tall and is found on the southern slopes of the Escambray Mountains in the Cienfuegos Province.

Fun Fact

In 1980, Fidel Castro shared seeds with a nature park in Oahu, where they were sprouted and nurtured. This specimen came to us as a branch cutting from one of those trees.



15. Coral Tree

Erythrina acanthocarpa

This spiny shrub is endemic to South Africa and can reach a height of six feet tall, with a striking bloom—a beautiful red flower with greenish tips. The species name *acanthocarpa* comes from Greek, *akanthos* meaning 'thorn' and *karpos* meaning 'fruit', referring to the spiny pods.

Fun Fact

The bean-shaped seeds of all coral trees range in size and color. Most are red, but some are brown and even two-toned red and black. The seeds of this species are brown and fairly large.



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