



Campus Arboretum

SEE THE TREE

Spotlighting the amazing and useful trees in the Campus Arboretum Living Collection

Focus on:
Calliandra haematocephala
"red powder puff"
Fabaceae



With a name like "red powder puff", this tropical species, native to Bolivia and distributed throughout tropical and sub-tropical regions of South and Central America, has performed unexpectedly well on campus where it is planted in somewhat protected areas. In its native range, it can grow up to 15 feet tall, but is often much smaller in areas experiencing cold winters where, tip die back requires pruning and produces a smaller more rounded shrubby form and size. While its environmental adaptation is less than par, it is a standout as a landscape ornamental due to its bright red flowers resulting from sprays of red stamens splaying out in all directions like fireworks. It is also welcome in our collection as part of a taxonomic display of *Calliandra* relatives (like the red and pink fairy duster we often see in landscapes throughout the southwest US) and because it has some promise for use in treatment of cancer.

To learn more, visit this Campus Arboretum Species Description page found at: <https://apps.cals.arizona.edu/arboretum/taxon.aspx?id=657>



Naturally growing with rounded, open form, this specimen has been pruned after experiencing freezing temperatures - producing a more dense ball shape.



Leaves of this plant are about 6 inches long, soft, flexible, pinnately compound (with 5-10 pairs of leaflets) with a cheerful, bright, tropical green color.

Ethnobotanical Uses:

In 2024, a publication examining the potential therapeutic uses of the red powder puff determined that it produces a wide range of chemical compounds including flavanoids, polysaccharides, alkaloids, glycosides, saponins, steroids, tannins, and terpenoids. Building on the traditional use of the plant extracts as antioxidants and for blood purification, the study determined that betulinic acid is abundant in the plant - a compound known to have for antitumor, anti HIV and antirotaviral activity in humans. <https://www.ijnrd.org/papers/IJNRD2403375.pdf>

Thanks for joining me on my journey to see and understand trees! The health of the planet and our fellow humans depends on respectful and understanding tree selection choices. I hope you're inspired to deepen the connection by visiting campus. and using the [interactive arboretum map](#) to find the tree featured in this spotlight for a more immersive education and sensory experience.



Enjoy!

Tanya

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