

# This World We Live in Will Be Only as Beautiful as You and I Make It

by

EDWIN A. MENNINGER

P.O. Box 107, Stuart, Florida 33494, U.S.A.

The beauty of the landscape might be defined as a visual loveliness that excites and exhilarates the senses pleasurably or exalts the mind or spirit. It is not necessarily confined to colour, though often augmented or brought out by contrasts of light and dark, or emphasized by colourful patterning, or affected by lighting displays. The contour of a mountain may be beautiful, or the depth of a yawning chasm may awaken a deep and almost overwhelming awe of the magnificence spread before the eye.

But the landscape of man-created communities throughout the world is too often lost in a maze of lawns and trees with their predominating blanket of green. This uninterrupted sameness is worsened in the warm areas of the earth where spring flowers are just a memory and autumn leaf colouring is unknown.

In Florida where I live and in similar warm areas throughout the world, the beauty of our landscape depends solely on how and where brilliant colours are utilized to brighten, decorate or emphasize the eye's acceptance of surroundings that are perpetually green. Untold numbers of lakes, waterways, sounds, estuaries, and nearly a thousand miles of ocean beaches create unexcelled natural beauty of their kind, especially when accentuated with light and shadow with the help of sun and moon, and can even achieve a wild sort of beauty with the aid of tempestuous winds. Sunrise and sunset provide the only colour overtones in these natural surroundings, usually fleeting, often magnificent. But, by and large, the natural landscape in Florida is an eternal, unending, unchanging vastness of green with nothing but daylight to bring its values to the eye. For without the eye, how can there be any physical beauty? There is a spiritual beauty known to all of us, but that develops in a world apart from material things and knows neither sunlight nor shadow. The physical landscape requires colour to achieve the ultimate in beauty.

Ponce de Leon must have been dreaming when he christened his discovery Florida — the land of flowers. There were no flowers, nothing but a vast expanse of green. It is easy to understand why people reaching California are overwhelmed by "the splendor of poppy fields ablaze in the sun of May." The gorgeous blue-bonnets of Texas are an eye-filling sight at their peak. And even in midsummer on the Kansas plains, the sight of the sunflowers, "tawny and gold and brown," is more magnificent than many other wild flower colonies. But in Florida, Ponce de Leon found no such display because there was none.

In the south end of the State, where Ponce de Leon never arrived, there are two native trees with beautiful flowers — the Geiger tree (*Cordia sebestena* L.) with quantities of burnt-orange blossoms among the evergreen leaves, blooming off and on several times a year; and the Lignum Vitae (*Guaiaecum officinale* L.) with the richest sky-blue starlike flowers all up and down the branches, a breath-taking

sight. The Geiger tree is sparingly cultivated half way up the state, but the Lignum Vitae is too slow growing to be useful as an ornamental and is almost never seen out of its native tropics.

Along the north line of Florida, by the Georgia-Alabama border, two beautiful native flowering trees add sparkle to the landscape — the Southern Magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora* L.) and the Fever tree or Maiden's Blushes (*Pinckneya pubens* Michx) with its gorgeous Rhododendron-like flowers, but Ponce de Leon did not see these either. He saw green trees and lots of them.

Many books are available today with literally thousands of colour photographs of the gorgeous flowers to be found in all parts of the world, and available to each one of us for our personal experience and enjoyment, if we only make the effort.

B. Y. Morrison, genius of the world of azaleas, long head of the U.S.D.A. Bureau of Plant Introduction, and kingpin of the American Horticultural Society for many years with both his pen and his purse, wrote the foreword in this author's book on *Flowering Trees of the World* in which 425 colour plates depict some of the most beautiful. Morrison was a dreamer too and he dreamed big. He wrote in part:

"It is true, perhaps, that many of the trees shown will be of no value to many a reader as plants for his garden, and that some may never even find a single place in these United States where they may repeat the miracle of their flowering. Does that matter too much? No, a thousand times no, for a mere examination of the pictures alone will open one's eyes to beauty and urge on one's zeal toward new efforts to know and experience, within the possible realm of one's own garden life, things he had never dreamed of.

"In this day and age, dare one dream? A thousand times yes, for without a dream there is no vision, and without vision, the people perish."

Hawaii is the classic example of how beauty on the landscape is born in the hearts of the people who live there. Like Florida, Hawaii has no native flowering trees that are outstandingly beautiful in blossom, except *Clermontia* and a few *Hibiscus*, and these are seldom seen. Yet the world has come to think of Hawaii as the ultimate in floral beauty. Why? Because the beauty which lies in the hearts of the Hawaiian people has found expression by the planting of millions of beautiful flowering trees which, in a fertile volcanic soil, pour out their spectacular flowers in eye-filling displays. The trees that bear them are from other warm countries, not from Hawaii. The gorgeous shower trees (*Cassia* sp.) are native to India. The magnificent *Plumeria* trees (which Floridians insist on calling "Frangipani") are natives of Mexico. One Hawaiian garden has 72 kinds of *Plumeria* trees; can you imagine such a spectacle? Some of these have blossoms 6 inches across! Flowers of *Plumeria* are particularly useful in making leis because they do not wilt when picked. The Hawaiian people hang bouquets around the necks of visitors and natives, mix moonlight and the music of steel guitars and chorus voices, to convince the guests that here is a flower heaven. We have the same moonlight in Florida; all we need is more beauty in our hearts.

Yes, no doubt about it, Ponce de Leon was dreaming. Four hundred years before our time he caught a glimpse of the magnificent spectacle that Florida would become when flowers of every size and hue from every warm country on earth would come here to make their home and add their beauty and colour to an indescribably lovely landscape. He saw the beauty that man could and would

