

The colours orange, scarlet and crimson.....

The colour orange and scarlet takes a beautiful dimension in the case of Flowering Trees in Delhi. In the month of January itself, some trees shed their leaves. The one I am referring to is the **Red Silk Cotton Tree** (*Bombax ceiba*) locally called the Semal or Indian Kapok. This tree is the first to sprout into flower buds by February and flowers profusely by mid March. The tree, initially is completely bare before the buds appear. Delhi is full of this deciduous tree. As Naturalist, Pradip Krishen in his book, *Trees of Delhi*, says, "Trees in flower arrest attention all over the city." It is certainly true for this one.



Flowers are large and waxy. Colours of the flowers on each tree varies **from scarlet, coral and pale yellow** while the white is not so common. The leaves appear after the flowers are over in April while the non-edible fruit appears in May. Silk cotton is collected to stuff pillows and quilts.



The Red Silk Cotton in Feb-April

This tree is quite a sight. In February the tree is bare with no leaves, the edible flower and bud is a treat to all birds and insects. Even squirrels, deer and other wild beast feast on the fallen flowers. In March the tree is full of dazzling colours of orange flowers. New leaves appear in early April when the amazing sight of shades of orange are over.

Another rare sight in Delhi you can catch in mid March is of **Kosam** (*Schleichera aoleosa*) or Kusum tree. See the photo below. The red on the tree is not the flowers but the new leaves in flaming red or bright scarlet in colour. The leaves start to turn yellow in Fall, in late February, with new red leaves in March and by April we see the tiny yellow flowers.



Kosum is in the
centre tree with
red leaves

Not to forget the evergreen **Bottlebrush** with bright red flowers, so commonly found in tropical regions. Walk in Lodhi Gardens on a red carpet of these flowers.

In early March, along with two friends, Trudy and Tamara, we visited the Garden Festival at the Garden of five Senses, near Saket in Delhi. Here we saw the **Indian Coral Tree** (*Erythrina variegata*) in full bloom with flowers bright scarlet in clusters. Here again the leaves shed in February and the tree is bare till April. In between the flowers appear. When we went, a purple sunbird was feasting on the nectar filled flowers. This and along with other variants, *Erythrina blakei* can be found in the compound of India International Centre enroute to Ford Foundation on Joseph Stein lane.



Indian Coral Tree

What do we see in April?

After the scenic beauty of the Semal and Coral Tree, look out for the **Sita -Ashok** (*Saraca asoca*). Pradip Krishen in his book *Trees of Delhi* calls it "India's most beautiful tree". Its exquisite pale -apricot flowers turn bright red in April. Friends, I bring to you this rare sight from my balcony window.



Sita Ashok from my balcony

Flowers of the Sita Ashok are orange-red, faintly fragrant in clusters of orange and scarlet. An evergreen tree, new leaves hang in limp tassels, pinkish at first. My best memories are walking with my friend Padma in both the Roshanara Gardens and Safdarjung Tomb. I still remember the joy of discovering the flowers emerging right out of the trunk of the tree.



Sita

Ashok at Safdarjung's Tomb – 6th April 2015.

Another not to be missed sight in Delhi again is also at Safdarjung Tomb in mid to late April and even so in early May.



Dhak at Safdarjung Tomb

After the Sita Ashok watch out for the **Dhak** (*Butea monosperma*) or Palash or Tesu Tree. This is the Flame of the Forest and not the Gulmohar. Clusters of fiery orange blossoms on leafless branches, with the buds appearing in January. The flowers yield an orange dye used in the festival Holi and this is how the Battle and place Plassey got its name from this Palash Tree. Eagerly waiting for the lockdown to lift to visit Safdarjung's tomb again. Join me one day for this interesting walk – Jor Bagh and around for the Awadh connection.

The last to flower in May for yet another profusion of scarlet and yellow is the **Gulmohar tree**. Flowers of the Gulmohar peak in May in loose clusters: 5 petals – 4 scarlet and one white and yellow and splashed with scarlet.



Gulmohar
flowers with
the Indian
Laburnum
(yellow
flowers).

All photos are from my scrap book which I maintain on a monthly basis for which tree is in flower. The book also has other flowering trees- the yellows, whites, purples etc. flowering trees in each month. What we present above is a small subset for you to discover the Trees by colour. My book also follows other remarkable changes in trees e.g. Sirius and Philkhan for you to see. **Follow the change and get to know your trees.** I invite you to *walk my scrap book*.

My love for birds: For me just talking of the orange and scarlet colours of trees is never complete without our Birds. Even the Historian and Novelist, Khushwant Singh has seen the Redstart in Delhi. Even I have seen the same in the cold winters in January around the Asian Games Village complex. The **White capped Redstart** has bright red and orange underparts. What I miss and is not seen in Delhi is the **Crimson Sunbird** with the male having a crimson breast. This bird is seen in Dehradun, on the foot hills of the Himalayas- a **perfect camouflage with the colours of Delhi Trees.**

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