

Handroanthus heptaphyllus

The Correct Name for the Pink Trumpet Tree in Southern California

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Figure 1 - The pink trumpet tree is arguably our most spectacular winter and spring flowering landscape tree, 7929 Bright Ave., Whittier, CA (D. R. Hodel).

The pink trumpet tree, or pink tab (an abbreviated derivation of the genus name *Tabebuia*) as it is sometimes called by flowering tree aficionados in California, is arguably our most spectacular winter and spring flowering landscape tree (Fig. 1). Blooming as early as November and lasting into April, it brightens our skies with a stunning display of pink and lavender. The tree typically flowers when leafless or nearly

so to show to best advantage the large, dense, many-flowered clusters or heads of tubular flowers positioned strategically at the ends of bare branches (Fig. 2).

Just a few years ago we learned that *Handroanthus*, rather than *Tabebuia*, was the correct genus name for our trumpet trees, which necessitated the change for the pink trumpet tree from *T. impetiginosa* to *H. impetiginosus* (Hodel 2011). Now we report



Figure 2 - Pink trumpet trees typically flower with large, dense, many-flowered clusters or heads of tubular flowers positioned strategically at the ends of bare branches, 13200 Penn St., Whittier, CA (D. R. Hodel).

that the long-familiar name *H. impetiginosus* has been misapplied to our pink trumpet tree and the correct name is actually *H. heptaphyllus*.

This discovery of the name *Handroanthus heptaphyllus* came about in 2014 when we carried out a lively exchange of e-letters on the subject. Matt had contacted Lúcia Lohmann, a Brazilian botanist who specializes in *Handroanthus* and *Tabebuia*, and she brought to our attention the differences between *H. heptaphyllus* and *H. impetiginosus* and, based on photos sent her, felt that our common pink trumpet tree was actually *H. heptaphyllus*, not *H. impetiginosus*.

Handroanthus heptaphyllus tends to be a smaller tree, to 15 m tall, or slightly taller in cultivation, while *H. impetiginosus* can attain 30 m in height. More importantly, *H. heptaphyllus* has leaflets to about 10 cm long with conspicuously serrate margins while *H. impetiginosus* has much larger leaflets to about 20 cm long and with smooth

or entire margins (Fig. 3). Also, in *H. heptaphyllus*, the petiole (sub-petiole) of the terminal leaflet is about as long or longer than the attached leaflet is wide (Fig. 3) while in *H. impetiginosus* the petiole of the terminal leaflet is conspicuously shorter than the leaflet is wide. The late Alwyn H. Gentry, neotropical Bignoniaceae expert at the Missouri Botanical Garden, also distinguished between the two species on the basis of the serrate and entire leaflet margins and petiole length relative to leaflet width (Gentry 1992). Table 1 summarizes some of the critical differences between these two species.



Figure 3 - Leaflets of this pink trumpet tree have serrated or toothed margins and the petiole of the terminal leaflet is as long or longer than the leaflet is wide, meaning it is *Handroanthus heptaphyllus*, Los Angeles County Arboretum & Botanic Garden, Arcadia, CA (D. R. Hodel).

Thus, it is clear that the correct name for pink trumpet tree that livens up our winter and spring skies is *Handroanthus heptaphyllus*, which begs the question is the true *H. impetiginosus* cultivated in southern California. It might, because Kenneth and Donald have found pink trumpet street trees

Table 1. Some Critical Differences Between *Handroanthus heptaphyllus* and *H. impetiginosus* (Gentry 1992).

Character	<i>H. heptaphyllus</i>	<i>H. impetiginosus</i>
habit	to 15 m tall	to 30 m tall
leaflet margins	serrate	entire
petioule	terminal one about as long or longer than leaflet width	terminal one shorter than leaflet width
fruit	<1.5 cm diam.	>1.5 cm diam.



Figure 4 -This pink trumpet tree is Whittier might actually be the true *Handroanthus impetiginosus* but it has yet to flower, 13255 Walnut St. (D. R. Hodel).

in Orange and Whittier (Fig. 4) that have large leaflets with entire margins and the petioule of the terminal leaflet is conspicuously shorter than the leaflet is wide (Fig. 5); unfortunately, they have yet to flower to confirm their identity. Nonetheless, they are sufficiently large to flower when compared to *H. heptaphyllus* and the fact that they have not yet flowered supports the notion that these must be larger trees that must attain a greater size to flower. We will watch these trees and report if and when they flower.



Figure 5 - The leaves of the pink trumpet tree in Figure 4 are large with smooth or entire margins and the petioule of the terminal leaflet is conspicuously shorter than the leaflet is wide, meaning it is likely the true *Handroanthus impetiginosus* (D. R. Hodel).

Literature Cited

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