



Cigar Plant *Cuphea ignea*

03-34



<u>Hardiness</u>	<u>Exposure</u>	<u>Soil</u>	<u>Water</u>	<u>Flowers</u>	<u>Height</u>
Zones 11-13, 16-24, H1, H2	Full sun or partial shade	Prefers light, well drained soil	Regular watering	Tubular, bright orange red with white tips, and dark ring at the end	Compact plant to one foot

The species name *ignea* (also called the specific) is Latin for fire. This references the brilliant orange flowers that inspire this tropical perennial's common names like cigar flower and cigarette plant. Personally I don't think these are very descriptive. But apparently there are some who think these skinny 1 inch long tubular flowers look like the glowing ember at the end of a cig - or is it because the flower is vaguely shaped like one of these notorious nicotine delivery devices. Either way I don't much see the resemblance!

Motivated by verbal threats, Susie the puppy unconcernedly retreats from a recent defilement of John's cigar plant.

Firecracker plant seems more descriptive to me. As the flower matures, it extends a thin threadlike pistil that looks to me just like a fuse. Indeed the flowers are about the same size as the tiny firecrackers, called ladyfingers, that I played with as a kid. But here in Florida, firecracker plant typically refers to *Russelia equisetiformis*, a plant with similarly shaped flowers so I guess we'll have to stick with cigar plant. Don't you think ladyfinger flower would make a credible alternative - who comes up with these common names anyway?

But I digress, cigar plant is a subshrub that grows to about 3 ft (0.9 m) in height with a similar spread. The leaves are lance shaped or narrowly elliptical and dark green measuring 1-1.5 in (2.5-3.8 cm) in length and 0.25-0.5 in (0.6-1.3 cm) wide.

They are arranged oppositely on the stems and flowers arise from where the leaves attach. The stems themselves are slender semi-woody, and tend to be brittle. The branching stems impart a dense, compact form that can become leggy late in the season but that barely diminishes its beauty.