PLANT FACT SHEET

Bombax ceiba (Burm.) L.

GENUS *Bombax* **FAMILY** Malvaceae

COMMON NAMES Kapok tree, Red silk-cotton tree

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Roots, Leaves, Flowers, Fruit, Seeds, Seeds - oil, Gum

The taproot of young plants is peeled then roasted and eaten.
Flowers are cooked as a vegetable or pickled. The flowers are dried and pounded and used for bread. They are also used in five flower tea.
The young leaves are boiled with condiments then eaten.
The unripe and ripe fruits are cooked as vegetables.
The seeds yield an edible fatty oil. The mature roasted seeds are eaten.
The buds, young pods and roots of seedling can be eaten cooked.
The young bark is used as a famine food. It is crushed and added to flour.

DESCRIPTION

A large tree. It loses its leaves in the dry season. It grows to 20-25 m tall and spreads to 8-15 m wide. The stem is erect. It has buttresses when mature. The trunk and branches are covered with large pyramid shaped spines. The crown is umbrella shaped. The bark is pale ash coloured. It develops cracks along its length with age. The leaves are arranged like fingers on a hand. The leaves are rounded and 30-50 cm across. There are 5-7 leaflets which are elliptical. These are 12-20 cm long. The leaves are bright green and leathery. The trees flower during the dry season when the tree has no leaves. The flowers are red, open or cup shaped and 10-15 cm across. The flowers are often clustered near the ends of branches. The flowers appear while the leaves have fallen from the tree. The flower petals are thickened and curved backwards in the upper half. The fruit is a brown oval capsule. This seed envelope is about 15 cm long. It has 5 angles and many seeds. The seeds are covered with soft, silky cotton.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. It grows in tropical monsoonal rainforest. It suits humid locations. It requires an open sunny position. It will grows on most soils. It can grow in limestone areas. It is drought and frost tender. Trees must have a temperature above 13°C. In Nepal plants grow to 1200 m altitude. In the Indian Himalayas it grows between 1,200-1,400 m above sea level. They are found at low altitudes throughout the Philippines. In India they grow in all deciduous forests. It can grow in arid places. It suits hardiness zones 10-12. In Sichuan and Yunnan.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants can be grown from seed or cuttings. Seed germinate easily. Cuttings of half ripe wood are used. They can also be grown by layering.

Harvesting and Seed Production

It is fast growing. The seeds contain 22-25% oil that is edible. In Sikkim seeds are available April to June.

NOTES

There are about 8 Bombax species. It was previously put in the family Bombacaceae. In the subfamily Bombacoideae.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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