

Friday, March 1, 2024

Bombax ceiba

Scientific name: *Bombax ceiba* L.

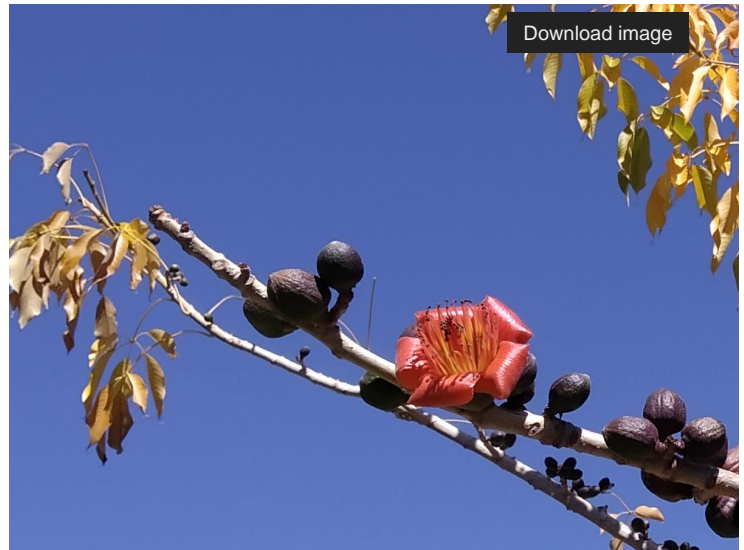
Family: *Malvaceae*

Common name: Kapok Tree, Red Silk Cotton Tree

This is a tree with spectacular flowers, which is believed to be native to India, and is distributed in tropical areas of China and Indonesia, and throughout Southeast Asia. The flower is the emblem of some Chinese cities and even of an airline.

It is a deciduous species, and the flowers appear in spring, before the new leaves appear. They are large, about 10 cm in diameter, and of a striking bright red or orange color. They have 5 curved, fleshy petals with stellate hairs, the calyx is bell-shaped. The fruits have a woody shell, which inside carry the seeds wrapped in cottony fibers. That is why this species is known as Red Silk Cotton Tree. Its scientific name also refers to this, as *Bombax* is the Greek word for cotton. The leaves are palmate, very similar to those of the *Ceiba* genus. The trunk can reach 25 m in height, is very straight and thorny when young, as a defense against animals, and the branches are spread horizontally.

The fibers of the fruit are used as stuffing for pillows and cushions; they are cellulose strands that fill with air and are useful for insulating materials, waterproofing, flotation or soundproofing. Its root has medicinal properties for the stomach. The flowers are used in Chinese tea infusions, and the fruit as a condiment in Indian cooking. At La Concepción there is a specimen next to the aloes in the succulent collection.

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