

Lonchocarpus hondurensis Benth.

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FABACEAE (BEAN FAMILY)

No synonyms

Chaperno, cincho, pellejo de vieja

Lonchocarpus hondurensis grows from Mexico, across Central America, to South America. It also grows in the Caribbean. In Honduras it is found in the departments of Cortes, Atlantida, Colon, Olancho, and Yoro (Jiménez 1995).

Lonchocarpus hondurensis is a semideciduous big tree, reaching 18 to 30 m in height and 30 to 100 cm in diameter. It has an umbellated or multilobellate crown and dark green, moderately dense foliage. The branches rise obliquely or stretch out, usually bending downward at the end. The trunk is straight, slightly irregular, and cylindrical; the base is elongated or with very small, aliform gambas. The bark is greenish-grayish to light coffee-colored, smooth, horizontal, and dense with lenticels that come loose in thin, small, and irregular pieces. The tree can be recognized by its imparipinnate, alternate leaves and by the blood-red exudation from the interior bark. The species grows in wet, swampy forests, usually along riverbanks or in periodically flooded lowlands.

The alburnum is yellowish, and the duramen is dark brown. The wood does not have a characteristic odor or taste. It has interwoven hilum, medium texture, medium shine, and marked streak. It does not contain silica and is deemed a hardwood. The wood is moderately easy to saw but, due to its high density, is hard to work with machinery and hand tools. Planing is difficult because the grain is interwoven. Tools must be sharp. It is durable to biodeterioration and susceptible to attacks by insects. Drying in the open air is satisfactory, without excessive cracks if the wood is dried slowly. It is difficult to preserve through vacuum-pressure systems. The wood is used for heavy construction, floors, parquet floors, furniture, cabinets, wagons, wheels, tool handles, crossbeams, frameworks, staves, interior walls, transoms, veneer, pilings, boats, turned

articles, agricultural tools, and crosspieces for transmission lines and poles and in rural construction (Benitez and Montesinos 1988).

The flowers appear in axillary panicles; flowers are purple-red, small, and very pretty. The tree blooms May through June and fruits June through August. Dehiscent fruits form in small flat pods that are 4 to 6 cm long and 1.5 to 2 cm wide, rounded to cuspidate at the apex, soft to the touch, frequently contracted among the seeds, with thick edges. Each pod contains one to two dark-red seeds. Seeds are orthodox, easy to handle, and formed like a capital C or a half moon. Seeds are corrugated to the touch and average 10,000 to 20,000 per kg with a viability of 80 to 90 percent (Benitez and Montesinos 1988, Standley 1931).

No pregermination treatment is required, and seeds germinate in 8 to 10 days.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The bevel is 1.5 to 2 cm thick, light yellow with brownish-red stripes, with a green zonal stripe under the rhytidome, fibrogranular, and moderately hard. It has a faint oily odor. It slowly exudes a blood-red, translucent sap, coming from the interior bark although it is not abundant.

The petiole and rachis are 6 to 10 cm long. The petiole alone is 1.5 to 2.5 cm long, cylindrical, glabrous, and thick, with pulvinate base. The rachis is cylindrical and glabrous. The petiole is approximately 1 cm long, caniculate, thick, and glabrous. There are three to four pairs of opposite leaflets with one terminal that is usually the biggest. The lamina is oblong to oblong-ovate, 6 to 12.5 cm by 3 to 6 cm; the apex is acumi-

nate mucronate; the base is rounded-truncated, with whole edges, and coriaceous; and the right side is opaque green with both surfaces glabrous. The main vein is prominent underneath; 6 to 8 pairs of secondary veins are finely prominent underneath and camptodrome. The reticulum of veins is not very distinctive (Benitez and Montesinos 1988).

