

Pseudobombax ellipticum (Kunth) Dugand

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BOMBACACEAE (BOMBAX FAMILY)

Bombax ellipticum H.B.K., *Carolinea insignis* (Guzmán 1980, Witsberger and others 1982)

Acoque, amapola, árbol de doncellas, árbol de señoritas, calinchuche, clavelina, jilinsuche, matías, pilinsuchil, pumpo, shaving bush, shilo, shilo blanco, shilo colorado (Carr 1998a, 1998b; Guzmán 1980; Witsberger and others 1982)

Pseudobombax ellipticum is native to southern Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras and has been introduced in the Caribbean and Hawaiian islands and southern Florida (Carr 1998a, 1998b).

Pseudobombax ellipticum is a tree that can reach 18 m in height and 1.3 m d.b.h. Its branches are close to the base of the stem. It is a deciduous tree with succulent stems, and leaves that are palmately compound with five leaflets. The species grows well in dry and rocky habitats or poor soils and is shade intolerant. *Pseudobombax ellipticum* grows at elevations from sea level to 1800 m (Witsberger and others 1982).

The wood of *P. ellipticum* is used for firewood and in the handicraft of carving dishes. The seeds contain carbohydrates and can be consumed if toasted. In El Salvador, the tea of the flowers is used for gastrointestinal ailments and the tea of the fresh bark is used to treat diabetes (González 1994, Guzmán 1980). The tree is grown as an ornamental in Florida and Hawaii (Kuck and Tongg 1960), and the attractive flowers are used to decorate homes and churches in Central America. The fine fibers of the fruits of several species of the Bombacaceae family, including *P. ellipticum*, are used to fill pillows and mattresses. The fibers have also been used to insulate refrigerators (Salter 1956). The tree may be used as living fence in rural areas.

In El Salvador, *P. ellipticum* loses its leaves December through May and flowers in December or January; its fruits mature in January and February (Witsberger and others 1982). In Hawaii, it blooms in March (Kuck and Tongg 1960). The pink or white flowers are solitary and have numerous stamens;

the elongated fruits are dehiscent capsules containing numerous seeds. The seeds are wind dispersed.

The fruits are collected manually from the tree before opening and dried to extract the seeds. The small seeds are manually separated from the fibers and stored under cool and dry conditions (Aragón 1998).

Pseudobombax ellipticum is propagated by seeds and cuttings. Seeds require sunny locations for germination. The cuttings, 40 to 100 cm in length and 2 to 5 cm in diameter, are easily rooted when planted in bags of sand and watered daily or when planted directly in the field (Salter 1956).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Three other important species in the Bombacaceae family are *Ceiba petandra* (L.) Gaerth, *Ochroma lagopus*, and *Bombacopsis quinatum* (Jacq.) Dugand. *Ceiba petandra* is a multiple-use tree and is the source of the fine, cotton-like fiber kapok. It is the national tree of Guatemala (Rojas 1993, Watson and Dallwitz 1992a, 1992b). *Ochroma lagopus*, or balsa, is a well-known tree that produces one of the world's hardest light woods. *Bombacopsis quinatum* (synonym *Bombax quinatum*) is a tree that produces good quality wood and has been extensively studied in Central America. This last species is easily propagated in plantations (Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación Enseñaza 1991a) and has many botanical characteristics similar to those of *P. ellipticum*. Designing field studies of *P. ellipticum* similar to those of *B. quinatum* are necessary to evaluate the growth rate and propagation methods.

