



**Tikal** National  
Park



# Tree Education

*Fruit Tree Planting Foundation Educational Tree Guide | Region: Guatemala*





# Ceiba or Yaaxché in Mayan

*Ceiba pentandra*

**Family:** Bombacaceae

## Background Information:

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Guatemala's national tree is the Ceiba, also known as kapok or silk cotton tree. A tall, stately tree that spreads its limbs at the top of the forest canopy, its downy fibers are used to this day to stuff pillows and cushions. The ceiba's most important role in many Guatemala communities, however, is to shade the main plaza with its leafy, long-reaching branches. This tradition goes back many centuries, to the days when the ancient Maya cultivated ceibas in the plazas of their cities.

In some of Guatemala's famous Maya ruins, these trees (or their descendants) still tower as high as 100 feet or more over what is left of these long-abandoned communities. A ceiba is an ecosystem in itself, since its clefts and branches (up to 150 feet across) are populated by many species of orchids, ferns, cacti, and bromeliads. Iguanas and other reptiles like to bask in the sun in its highest branches. The fruits of this tree are big, hard, long capsules which contain cotton fibers. The Ceiba has many uses, such as in traditional medicine, kapok fiber, oil and even human feed. The Ceiba grows easily up to 70 mts. tall. It is a cylindrical and straight tree, with leaves that look like fingers. Its bark is grey-rose and smooth.



## Care Information:

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This tree grows in humid and semi humid forest, it thrives at an altitude of 0-500 meters above sea level, and at temperatures between 20°C to 30°C. It grows naturally from Mexico throughout all of Central America and Brazil.





# Sapodilla Tree

*Manilkara zapota*

Family: Sapotaceae

## Background Information:

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The tropical forests of Guatemala contain many useful plants, including the sapodilla tree, from which a sticky substance is tapped, that formed the original base of chewing gum before synthetics were introduced. Chicle was a major export of the Petén jungle during the first half of the 20th century. A few countries, mainly Japan, still import chicle, which, in turn, provides a source of income for those chicleros living in or near the forest.



Like the rubber tree, which also grows wild in the Petén, the sapodilla must be tapped carefully to insure that it will remain alive to provide chicle over a period of many years.



## Care Information:

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The Sapodilla Tree is a big one, sometimes 40 mts. high, often its trunk is very thick, and the bark is brown with gray spots, moderately smooth and deeply fissured. This tree lives at 0 to 1200 meters above sea level in dry subtropical forests, humid subtropical forests and very humid subtropical forest. Its edible fruit, named zapote, is delicious. The Maya called it Sak-ya.



# Mahogany

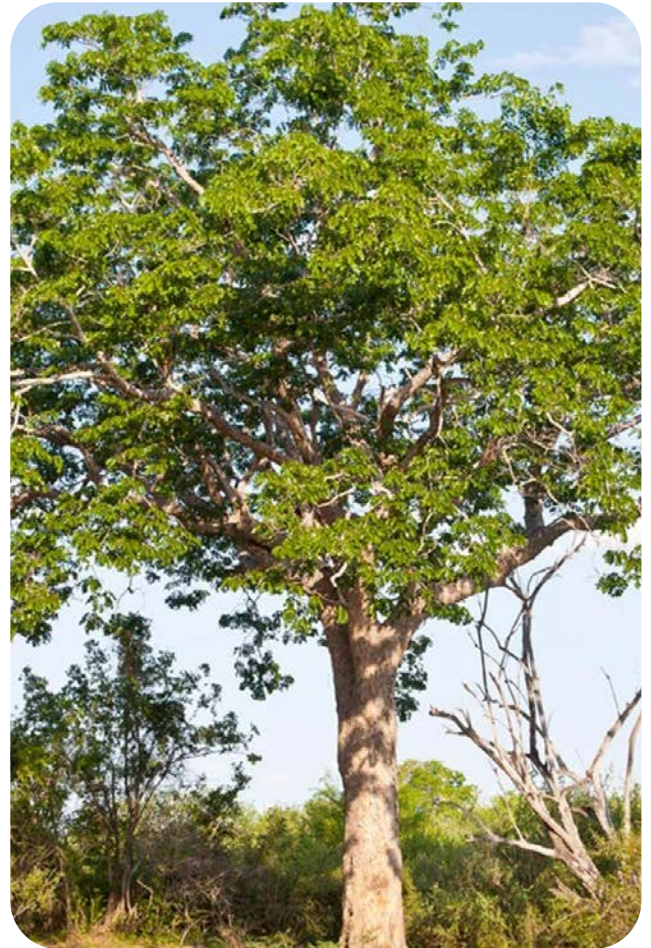
*Swietenia macrophylla*

Family: Meliaceae

## Background Information:

A less common tropical tree is the mahogany; a prized hardwood used to make fine furniture that takes up to 80 years to mature. It can grow to be 50 meters tall (100 feet) or more. Its prominent roots, called *gambas*, are large supporting buttresses at its base, spanning up to 4.5 meters (20 feet across) on the forest floor. The Mahogany has a dense top, with alternating leaflets composed of 8 to 12 leaves, of a brilliant green hue. Never numerous, this tree has become very scarce due to its harvesting for export and its slow propagation.

The mahogany has small whitish flowers and dark, pear-shaped seedpods. The fruit is a capsule, 12 cms. large, reddish, salmon or yellow-rose. When the ripe fruits fall and become scattered by animals, the rich mulch of the forest floor allows them to germinate and sprout, beginning a new cycle of life. It is found in humid forests between the latitudes of 0 to 500 meters above sea level. The temperatures at which these trees prosper is between 20°C to 30°C. The Mahogany has many uses, such as for traditional medicine and to make musical instruments. This tree grows up in the Atlantic Coast from Mexico through Panama and the Amazon region of Peru, Bolivia and Brazil. It was used by the Maya to make dugout canoes. They called this tree Punab.



## Dugout Canoes





# Cedar

*Cedrela odorata*

Family: Meliaceae

## Background Information:

This tree is distinguished by its whitish and brilliant surfaced bark. Its trunk is straight and slender. Its leaves when crushed smell like garlic, a characteristic smell that extends throughout the woods. The Cedar grows in humid subtropical forests and dry subtropical forests, between 0 to 900 meters above sea level, in Peten, Quiche, Alta Verapaz, Izabal, San Marcos, Quetzaltenango, Retahuleu, Suchitepequez, Escuintla and Santa Rosa in Guatemala. It also grows in Belize, and in other counties from the South of Mexico throughout South America in subtropical and tropical forests.

It requires temperatures between 20°C and 30°C to grow. The Cedar is well known, because it has been used in the local and international wood business for hundreds of years, being a tropical hardwood. The Spanish conquerors were the first ones to use it and gave it the name of Spanish Cedar because they associate its smell with that of the Old World Cedar.

The resin of this tree is very resilient and was used to prepare laboratory samples. It was an export wood, used to make boxes for Cigarettes and Cigars in the 1800s. In Guatemala it is used frequently in ornamental gardens and shade coffee plantations. In the jungle it is a beautiful sight, where parrots make their nests and feed.





# Matilisquate

*Tabebuia rosea*

Family: Bignoniaceae

## Background Information:

The Matilisquate tree grows in the humid forest. It grows at an altitude of 0 to 1300 meters above sea level and it may thrive in temperatures between 17°C to 30°C. The main use of this tree is for traditional medicine. The Matilisquate is a medium level tree. Its bark is straight. The Matilisquate may reach 30 meters in height and 70 cms. in diameter.

It has a prominent top. The bark is fissured in parts and it is rough and gray. The wood is yellow and in some parts brown with strong and durable texture. Its fruit grows in long capsules with a lot of seeds inside. This tree is found in Mexico, Central America, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela and The Antillas.





# Ramon

*Brosimum alicastrum*

Family: Moraceae

## Background Information:

The Ramon grows in the humid and sub-tropical forest. It grows at an altitude of 80 to 1600 mts above sea level; it thrives on temperatures between 21°C to 25°C. It is used commonly as human food. The Ramón grows to be 40 meters tall and 1 meter across in diameter. Sometimes, twice a year, it loses its foliage. Its bark is channeled and cylindrical, and it has outer roots, which provide the necessary support. It contains a milky sap.

On the outside the bark is smooth, white gray and with reddish wood, the central section of it is yellow. The fruit of this tree is orange with seeds containing much starch. It does not have any color or flavor. In Guatemala it grows in all of the south coast and in the north west region of Peten. It is great fodder for our mules in the forest, which we use in our expeditions...





# Hormigo

*Platymiscium dimorphandrum*

Family: Papilionaceae

## Background Information:

The Hormigo is a tree that grows in humid forest zones. It is a subtropical tree, which thrives at an altitude of 0 to 1400 meters above sea level and at temperatures of between 22°C to 27°C. It is used commonly to make musical instruments, such as the keys of the marimba. The Hormigo, reaches 25 to 30 meters in height and a diameter of 60 or more centimeters. Its bark is smooth, straight and cylindrical. The bark is brown gray and fissured in a longitudinal form.

Its wood is reddish with clear pigmentation, it is strong and compacted, durable and beautiful sounding when struck. The top is thin with opposing uneven leaves. Its yellow flowers grow in bundles. Its fruit are small membranous smooth vines, and have only one seedling. It grows in Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras.

In Guatemala it grows in El Petén, Alta Verapaz, Baja Verapaz, Izabal, Chiquimula, Jutiapa, Escuintla, Suchitepequez, Retahuleu, Quetzaltenango and in Huehuetenango.







# Santa Maria

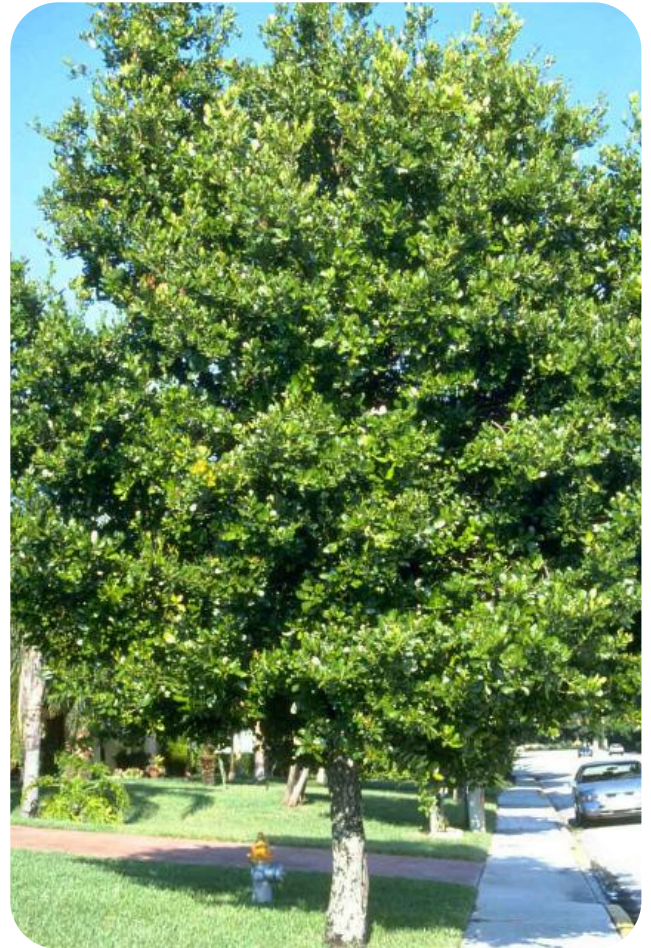
*Calophyllum brasiliensis*

Family: **Guttiferae**

## **Background Information:**

The Santa Maria Tree grows in humid and dry forest zones at an altitude of 0 to 1200 meters above sea level. This tree has many uses: medicine, foraging, ornamental and good shade. The Santa Maria is a tree that grows 40 meters high and 1 meter in diameter. It contains a yellow latex. Its brown bark is finely fissured.

Its wood is yellowish externally with a reddish or rosy inside. Its fruits are fleshy with just one round, green and yellow seed. It grows in the south of Mexico and in all Central America throughout the Northern region of South America.





# Guarumo

*Cecropia peltata*

Family: Moraceae

## Background Information:

The Guarumo is a medium tree that can reach 20 mts. in height and is found occasionally in shiny places or in the shores of water. Regularly, it has long roots and its stalk is straight, while its bark is gray, smooth and interrupted by rings which may be seen around the stalk. These are scars left behind by fallen leaves while the tree is growing. Ants because of their honey often frequent this tree's flowers, and the "ears" represent food for some birds and mammals.

However, the Mayas perhaps used this tree as a food resource. The alcoholic extract of Guarumo in adequate doses increase the contraction of ventricular energy, and it is applied in therapeutic ways. It has good diuretic properties because increases urinary secretions and regularizes the cardiac pulse. In the region of El Petén, it is called guarumo, and in Belize it is known as the tobacco tree.





# Copal

*Cupania belizensis*

Family: Sapindaceae

## Background Information:

This tree is known in the forest for its leaves which have a characteristic smell when crushed, these leaves are green in the superior face and a lighter tone in the lower face, where the nerves are quite defined. The Copal is a tree that may reach up to 15 mts. in height and 20 to 35 cms. in diameter. This tree grows in the humid subtropical forest from 0 to 600 meters above sea level.

However, this tree maybe was used by the Maya to prepare incense, which they used in their rituals. Its wood is reddish and is used only to make rural constructions and for fuel. The Copal does not have any commercial characteristics, except to produce incense. Its resins are still burned during festivals and ritual offerings, they are thought to have a purifying function and its thick smoke was meant to go up to the heavens and transmit messages to the Gods...





# Cojon

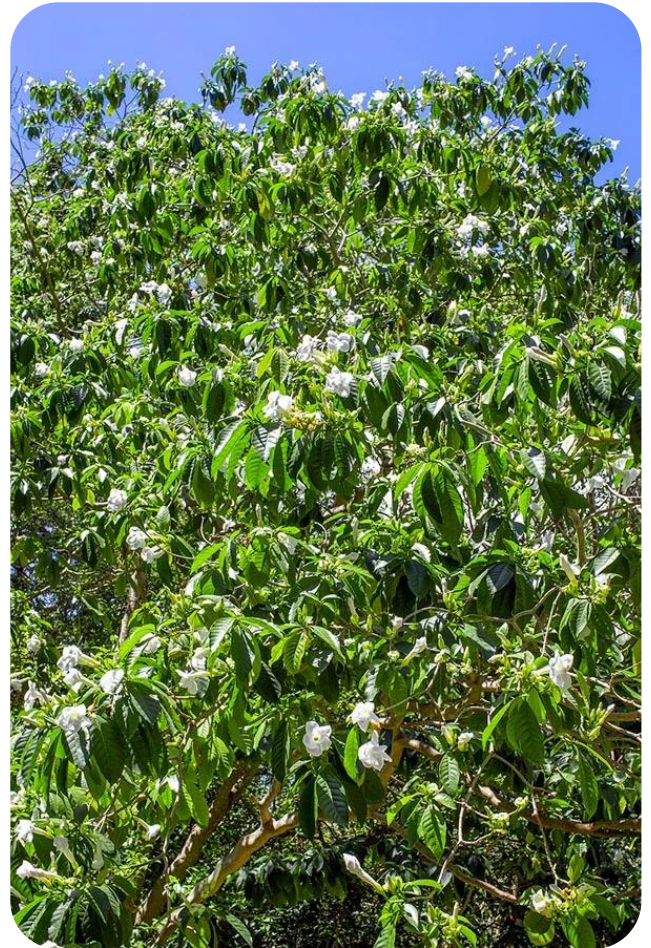
*Tabernaemontana donnel-smithii*

Family: Apocynaceae

## Background Information:

This tree has gray bark, with greenish to yellowish tones, which exudes a whitish latex. It receives much notice in Tikal because of its fruit, composed of 2 separate carpels, which resemble horse's testicles, from which it receives its name. Inside, along the fruits' length of 3 to 6 cms., are red or orange seeds which are produced in abundance. When it was cut exude abundant latex, it occurs in the same manner with the leaves.

This tree grows up in humid subtropical forest, or very humid subtropical forest, like Peten, Belice, Quiche, Alta Verapaz, Izabal, Santa Rosa, Escuintla, Guatemala, Solola, Suchitepequez, Retahuleu, Quetzaltenango, San Marcos and from the South East of Mexico to Panama. The wood is light brown, and it is a little bit smooth and the weight is strong and firm. It is not used for any purpose. Some chicleros use the latex to adulterate the composition of the Chicle.





# Escobo

*Cryosophila stauracantha*

Family: Barlett

## Background Information:

This palm is recognized in the forest especially because its outer roots in the base of the stalk and the spines are ramify, on its inferior face the leaves are silver-plate, its stalk is relatively thing and long. This tree can reach the 8 mts. high; the bark is about 5 cms. of diameter covered by simple thorns. This tree grows up in humid and very humid subtropical forest, 0-900 meters above sea level, it lives in Peten, Alta Verapaz, Izabal, Belice, Campeche and Mexico.

Species of this kind exists only in Guatemala and Campeche. It is believed this palms was used by the Mayans to catch fishes. This plant is appropriate to use as ornament in gardens and green areas, it is used actually to make the roof of rural houses and to make brushes.





# All Spice

*Pimenta dioica*

Family: Myrtaceae

## Background Information:

The All spice tree is one of the best well known by the people of the region of el Peten and Tikal, and it was undoubtedly by the Mayans, because it is a Home medicine, and it is used to seasoning food. It is recognized in the forest at the first by its smell, and then because the bark is regularly yellow with red spots, smooth, the stalk not always straight and with some characteristic bulkies, which distinguish the tree.

The leafs when are crushed have a strong Pimienta Gorda's smell which can confuse. The flowers are fragrant with a 6 cms. of diameter. The fruit is a berry of 10 cms.. with 1 or 2 seeds. The tree can reach 20 mts. High, and 30 or 40 diameter. This tree lives 0-400 under sea level in humid subtropical forest, and very humid subtropical forest, like Peten, Belize, Quiche, Alta Verapaz, Izabal, from South East of Mexico to Panama.

All spice wood is brown reddish. It is one of the harder woods of Guatemala. It is commonly used but as ornamental and to produce pepper, the density is appropriate to produce a excellent degree coal. It is possible that the Mayans used it in this way and called it Nabacuk.

