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*Caesalpinia*

*Leguminosae*

[*Caesalpinaceae/Fabaceae*]

*Caesalpinia* commemorates an Italian physician, philosopher and botanist, Andrea Cesalpino (1519-1603) who was botanic director of the Botanic Garden at Pisa from 1554-1558, and later physician to Pope Clement VIII and professor of medicine at La Sapienza in Rome. For many authorities he is considered to have been one of the most significant thinkers in the botanical field after Theophrastus (c.372-c.287 BC) the Greek philosopher and amongst many other works he wrote *De plantis libri XVI* (1583)..

Apparently wood from trees in this genus first reached Europe in the Middle Ages from Asia and was known by various names including *bresil* and *brezile* wood. Once the Europeans began to penetrate the Americas in the 1500s, the Portuguese began to import goods into Europe from there – including a wood similar to the already familiar *bresil* or *brezile* wood only this came from a tree of the same genus but native to South America. This too was sold by the familiar name *bresil* and from this it is claimed its country of origin came to be known as ‘Brazil’.

Members of this family absorb nitrogen from the air. Through the bacterial nodules on their deep growing roots, they will introduce nitrogen to the soil (and aerate it) to the benefit of neighbouring plants and any following them in the same soil.