

Hura crepitans

SANDBOX TREE is a deciduous tree. Native to tropical America (particularly the West Indies and the southern United States), it has deep red flowers.

It is also known as *Acacu* (Brazilian), *Arbol del diablo* (Mexican), *Arbre du diable* (French), *Assacu* (Brazilian), *Ceiba amarilla* (Colombian), *Ceiba blanca* (Venezuelan), *Ceiba de leche* (Colombian), *Ceiba habillo* (Venezuelan), *Haba* (Mexican), *Hura*, *Huru*, *Javilla* (Spanish), *Monkey pistol*, *Monkey's dinner bell*, *Mullarasanam* (Tamil), *Possomwood*, *Rabi* (Creole), *Rabie* (French), *Sablier* (French), *Sandbüchsenbaum* (German), *Shotgun tree*, *Simabruga* (Telugu), and *Zandkokerboom* (Dutch).

When the woody fruit are ripe their woody sections burst abruptly with a loud report and the seeds are ejected about 45 ft.

Warning – sap and seeds particularly are poisonous. They can be purgative and can cause severe vomiting, pain, delirium, collapse and death. Contact with the plant can cause skin irritation for some people, and the sap's contact with the eyes can cause temporary blindness. It is also poisonous for most animals.

Crepitans means 'rustling or crackling'.

The whole unripe fruit used to be filled with sand and wired together to make little sand-boxes.

These made a convenient quill container and the fine sand put in them not only cleaned the pen but also acted like blotting paper when dusted over a freshly written sheet of paper. Today the fruit are sometimes made into paper weights by dropping molten lead through the central opening into the hollow core to hold the internal sections together.

When dried the fruit are also used as decorative pen-holders. In Dominica lobes of the fruit are used to make jewellery.

In tropical American countries the latex, which has been used as a fish poison, has also been an ingredient in arrow poison.

The tree has been cultivated in some regions for its shade both at the roadside and among crops.

In the past it has also been grown to bind sand dunes and reduce their movement.

The wood is used today on a commercial scale for interior finishing, crates, and general carpentry.

Medicinally, a poultice of the leaves used to be applied to boils and swellings, and was also recommended for easing rheumatic pain. The seeds have been used in the past as a purgative. In Brazil the sap has provided a treatment for leprosy.