

Pithecellobium saman

[Synonyms : *Acacia propinqua*, *Albizia saman*, *Calliandra saman*, *Calliandra tubulosa*, *Enterolobium saman*, *Feuilleea saman*, *Inga cinerea*, *Inga salutaris*, *Mimosa pubifera*, *Mimosa saman*, *Pithecellobium cinereum*, *Pithecellobium saman* var. *acutifolium*, *Samanea saman*]

MONKEY POD is a semi-deciduous tree. Native from Central America to Brazil and Peru, it has many tiny mimosa-like, pale pink flowers with prominent stamens.

It is also known as *Algarrobo* (Cuban, Guatemalan, Mexican), *Arbre à la pluie* (French), *Carabali* (Venezuelan), *Cenicero* (Costa Rican, Salvadoran), Cow tamarind, *Dormilon* (Puerto Rican), *Enterolóbio* (Portuguese), *Falsa Albizia* (Portuguese), *Huacamayo-chico* (Peruvian), *Hujan-hujan* (Malaysian), *Lara* (Venezuelan), *Mimosa*, *Pini-karal* (Sanskrit), Rainfall bush, Rainfall tree, Raintree, *Regenbaum* (German), *Regnträäd* (Swedish), *Regntræ* (Danish), *Samaguare* (Colombian), *Saman*, *Samán* (Spanish), and Saman tree.

The flowers are pollinated by bees.

The tree's shallow roots explain why it can be uprooted in strong winds. The cut wood seasons to dark-streaked, light to golden-brown. The leaflets close at night and under heavy cloud-cover thus allowing rain to penetrate the tree's crown with ease. This probably makes a significant contribution to the tree's mini-climate which during drought enables grass beneath the tree's canopy to remain relatively lush while beyond it the growth becomes parched and brown.

Saman is a local South American name.

The long blackish-brown fruit pods with their liquorice-like taste are eaten locally (especially by children who are said to enjoy chewing them). This is also a honey tree.

Cattle, goats and pigs eat the nutritious fruit pods. In fact some South American countries harvest and export the pods lucratively as 'fattening-up' cattle fodder.

The tree is often cultivated for its shade, notably in tropical coffee (*Coffea*) and cocoa (*Theobroma cacao*) plantations.(especially in Guyana and the West Indies) or in cattle pastures. Its shade is also sought along roadsides and in parking lots. It would seem however that authorities tend to urge second thoughts on these latter sites for at least two reasons. One is that the shallow main roots sometimes push up above the soil which could be more than disconcerting if they emerged through a surfaced road or car park. The second reason is the tree's litter (sticky flowers, gum and seed pods) that is dropped virtually throughout the year. It is also cultivated as an ornamental.

The foliage provides a rich green manure.

This lightweight hard and durable, dark brown wood has been used for joinery and veneering, and has been made into furniture and also bowls (the sporting kind). Apparently carving and turning souvenir bowls from this wood began in 1946 and although most of them are made today in Thailand and the Philippines, Hawaii's name for making these is still remembered. In some places the wood has been prized for carving too.

Monkey pod is thought to have reached Guam and Puerto Rico in the 16th Century. It was introduced to Sri Lanka (Ceylon) in about 1850 – and Hawaii only three years earlier. The latter introduction is laid by some at the door of a Hawaiian businessman, Peter A.

Brinsmade, who is believed to have produced two of the tiny reddish-brown seeds on his return to Hawaii by way of Panama following a trip to Europe.