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*Pseudobombax ellipticum*

[Synonyms : *Bombax ellipticum*]

**SHAVING-BRUSH TREE** is a deciduous tree. Native from Mexico to Guatemala it has white to pink flowers with narrow backward-curving petals and long pink to red stamens before the leaves.

It is also known as Amapola, and Cotton tree.

The to 10 in. long, pinkish-brown flower buds look like oblong, chocolate-tipped biscuits standing on end in chocolate-coloured acorn-like cups. As they develop the protective covering splits abruptly into 5 tongue-shaped segments that roll back like wood-chipping scrolls. The myriad long pink to red stamens emerge then and form a dramatic, thick shaving-brush-like head with a single slender pistil extending beyond this which brushes pollen from any visiting bird or bee or other insect.

*Ellipticum* means 'elliptic (curved sides longer than wide and broadest in the middle) or oval' usually with reference to leaf shape.

In Guatemala the very soft, reddish-brown wood has been used locally for making dugout canoes.

Wood has been used for building interiors.

The tree is believed to have been introduced to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1888.

Local herbalists have used a plant decoction to treat toothache.