

# Cañafístola

(Caña Fistula, Shower of Gold,  
Indian Laburnum)

*Cassia fistula* L.

**Family:** Caesalpiniaceae (Leguminosae)

**Origin:** Tropical Asia.

**Height:** A small tree 7–8 m (23–26 ft) tall.

**Trunk:** Straight, with smooth brown bark.

**Canopy:** Narrow, deciduous.

**Leaves:** Alternate, compound, very large (up to 50 cm [20 in] long) with four to eight pairs of leaflets 10–12 cm (4–6 in) long, bright green above and silvery below.

**Flowers:** Very decorative, in large, cascading racemes 30–50 cm (12–20 in) long, each containing up to 30 golden yellow flowers of five petals suspended from a small stalk. The plant flowers from May to August.



**Fruits:** The long, pendant, cylindrical brown pod about 40 cm (16 in) long and 2–3 cm ( $\frac{3}{4}$ –1 in) in diameter contains numerous flat seeds surrounded by a sweet brown pulp; they take over a year to ripen.

**Comments:** Cañafístola is one of the most beautiful exotic flowering trees and is used extensively throughout the island of Cuba in streets and parks. The pulp in the seedpods is used as a laxative; Cañafístola was one of the earliest medicinal plants to be introduced into the island.



# Cañandonga

(Cañafistula Cimarrona, Coral Shower, Horse Cassia)

*Cassia grandis* L.f.

**Family:** Caesalpiniaceae (Leguminosae)

**Origin:** Eastern Cuba; Central and South America.

**Height:** A tall tree growing to 15–30 m (50–100 ft).

**Trunk:** Straight, smooth, up to 1 m (3¼ ft) diameter in very old trees; the bark is grey.

**Canopy:** Deciduous, the canopy appearing rounded to extended.

**Leaves:** Alternate, compound with 8 to 20 pairs of leaflets 3–5 cm (1–2 in) long and 10–15 cm (4–6 in) wide; deep green.

**Flowers:** Very decorative; the coral pink to red flowers have six rounded petals 1.5 cm (½ in) wide, with long, golden yellow stamens; they appear in dense axillary clusters 10–20 cm (4–8 in) long. Flowers briefly and spectacularly at the beginning of the rainy season (May–June).



**Fruits:** Cylindrical, brown, rough seedpods 30–90 cm (12–36 in) long, containing numerous flat seeds, arranged like stacks of coins in individual compartments, embedded in an evil-smelling (but delicious) brown pulp.

**Comments:** There is some debate as to whether Cañandonga is indigenous or naturalized, but it is very common in the Eastern provinces of Cuba. It occurs naturally in semi-deciduous forests, and is cultivated in gardens and open spaces for its dramatically beautiful blossom. The pulp is used for making refreshing drinks and has medicinal properties: it is a laxative and also increases the haemoglobin level of the blood.



# Caoba

(Caoba de Cuba, Caoba Antillana, Mahogany)

*Swietenia mahagoni* (L.) Jacq.

**Family:** Meliaceae

**Origin:** Caribbean islands.

**Height:** Up to 20 m (65 ft).

**Trunk:** Straight with deep brown, furrowed bark; it can reach about 2 m (6½ ft) in diameter when growing in deep soil.

**Canopy:** Round, dense foliage.

**Leaves:** Compound with two to five pairs of leaflets asymmetric at their base; vivid green, 3–7 cm (1–2¾ in) long; the whole leaf is up to 30 cm (12 in) long; deciduous in the dry season.

**Flowers:** Inconspicuous white flowers in inflorescences. The tree flowers at the beginning of the rainy season.

**Fruits:** Brown, woody seedpods 6–10 cm (2¼–4 in) long containing numerous seeds attached to reddish-brown papery wings, which permit their dispersal in



the wind. The fruits ripen in February/ March, when the tree is without its leaves.

**Comments:** Caoba is one of the most outstanding timber trees in Cuba, famous for its hardness and beautiful colour. Having been harvested for over five centuries, it has become scarce on the island. Caoba trees can grow in most Cuban soil types, with the exception of particularly poor ones. Outstandingly good Caoba furniture may be seen in the Museum of Colonial Art in Havana's Cathedral Square. Recently, *Swietenia macrophylla*, a species related to Caoba, has been introduced to the island. It is known as Caoba de Honduras, has larger leaves and seeds, and can hybridize with the native species, producing an excellent and fast-growing timber tree.



# Carambola

(Ciruela China, Ciruelón Chino, Star Fruit)

*Averhoa carambola* L.

**Family:** Oxalidaceae

**Origin:** Tropical Asia.

**Height:** Up to 10 m (33 ft) but often less in Cuba.

**Trunk:** Smooth, brown trunk with numerous branches.

**Canopy:** Rounded, densely leafed, perennial.

**Leaves:** Alternate, growing in a spiral pattern direct from the branches, compound, with five to ten oval leaflets. The leaves are deep glossy green and measure 15–20 cm (6–8 in) long.

**Flowers:** Small but very attractive, the reddish-purple flowers grow in clusters on the trunk and branches. The tree blossoms several times a year.



**Fruits:** The waxy, fragrant fruit with five deep ribs turns orange-yellow when ripe. It is elliptical in form, 10–12 cm (4–5 in) long, and when cut sideways produces star-shaped slices. Each rib of the fruit contains several seeds.

**Comments:** This beautiful tree may be planted both as an ornamental and as a useful fruit tree. Its dense foliage contrasted with its golden fruits is very decorative. The flesh of the fruit is initially sour, but is very sweet when it ripens. Carambola fruit is rich in Vitamin C; delicious juice is extracted from it and the fruit is used for puddings, in salads and for making wine.



# Cardenal

**(Arbol Cardenal, Pride of Guatemala)**

*Phyllocarpus septentrionalis* Donn. Smith

**Family:** Caesalpiniaceae (Leguminosae)

**Origin:** Guatemala and Honduras.

**Height:** A tall tree growing up to 20 m (65 ft).

**Trunk:** Straight, smooth, with light brown bark.

**Canopy:** Deciduous, extended, with arching branches.

**Leaves:** Alternate, compound of leaflets about 8 cm (3 in) long and 5 cm (2 in) wide, arranged in four to eight pairs, bright green.

**Flowers:** The spectacular blooms consist of dense clusters of tiny bright red flowers with six petals and very long,



red stamens. Flowers in the dry season (February–March).

**Fruits:** Dehiscent flat seedpods of about 15 cm (6 in) long and 5 cm (2 in) wide, with winged seeds.

**Comments:** This is one of the island's most beautiful trees, although it is not very common. One group that merits inspection is established at the National Botanic Garden, in the Central America zone.

