

Siamese cassia

Cassia siamea Lam.

Legume family (Leguminosae)

Post-Cook introduction

This introduced tree planted in lowlands, especially along roadsides, has large showy clusters of numerous bright yellow flowers in late summer and many long narrow flat dark brown pods that remain attached and become unattractive. Medium-sized evergreen tree 60 ft (18 m) high with straight trunk and axis 1 ft (0.3 m) in diameter and erect crown. Bark gray or light brown, smoothish, becoming slightly fissured. Inner bark light brown, gritty and tasteless. Twigs greenish and minutely hairy when young, turning brown. Cassia subfamily (Caesalpinioideae).

Leaves alternate, even pinnate, 9–13 inches (23–33 cm) long, with slender grooved green and reddish tinged, finely hairy axis. Leaflets 12–22 on short stalks of $\frac{1}{8}$ inch (3 mm), oblong, of uniform size, $1\frac{1}{4}$ –3 inches (3–7.5 cm) long and $\frac{1}{2}$ – $\frac{7}{8}$ inch (13–22 mm) broad, rounded at both ends, with tiny bristle tip, not toothed, thin, upper surface slightly shiny green and almost hairless, and lower surface gray green with sparse tiny hairs.

Flower clusters (panicles) large erect terminal, 8–12 inches (20–30 cm) or more in length and 5 inches (13 cm) broad. Flowers almost regular, on straight yellow green finely hairy stalks of $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches (2.5–3 cm). Calyx is composed of 5 concave pointed greenish yellow, finely hairy sepals $\frac{5}{16}$ inch (8 mm) long; corolla of five shortstalked spreading nearly equal bright yellow petals $\frac{5}{8}$ – $\frac{3}{4}$ inch (15–19 mm) long; seven stamens of different lengths and three smaller sterile stamens; and pistil with pale green, minutely hairy one-celled ovary and curved style. Flowering from July to October.

Pods, so numerous that they sometimes give an untidy appearance to the tree, are 6–10 inches (15–25 cm) long, about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (13 mm) broad, and $\frac{1}{16}$ inch (1.5 mm) thick, stiff and often slightly curved, splitting up sides into two parts. Seeds many, beanlike, elliptical, $\frac{5}{16}$ inch (8 mm) long, shiny dark brown.

The sapwood is light brown and the heartwood dark brown. The wood is heavy (sp. gr. 0.75) and hard. It has a beautiful figure on flat-sawn faces imparted by prominent parenchyma tissue that is reminiscent of a pheasant's tail, causing the wood frequently to be called

“pheasant wood.” The wood, which is very susceptible to attack by dry-wood termites, is used for small turnery and carvings and is very popular. Elsewhere, it is employed for posts, fuel, construction, furniture, and similar purposes. Tannin has been extracted from the bark.

Only about 1500 trees have been planted in the Forest Reserves, almost all on Oahu. It is not commonly planted now as an ornamental because of the messy appearance of its pods. However, many old trees are still seen along roads and in old gardens. A prime example is a labeled tree near the ewa-makai gate of Iolani Palace grounds.

The species has been widely planted in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands in recent years for ornament, shade, and windbreaks. The trees form good windbreaks because they retain a deep closed crown. They are propagated by seeds, grow very rapidly in full sunlight, and are suitable for fuel within a few years. However, they are very susceptible to attack by scale insects there.

The seeds, pods, and foliage are toxic to hogs and cause death quickly after being eaten. As hogs relish the poisonous leaves, farmers in Puerto Rico have suffered losses. Trees blown over or broken by storms increase the danger. Thus, swine and perhaps other livestock should be kept away from these trees.

Planted in lowlands, especially along roadsides in Hawaii and escaping. Introduced about 1865.

Special area

Iolani

Range

Native of East Indies, Malaysia, India, and Sri Lanka, spread by cultivation. First described from Siam (now Thailand), as the common and scientific names indicate. Widely planted in West Indies and naturalized locally. Planted also in southern Florida, Central America, and northern South America.

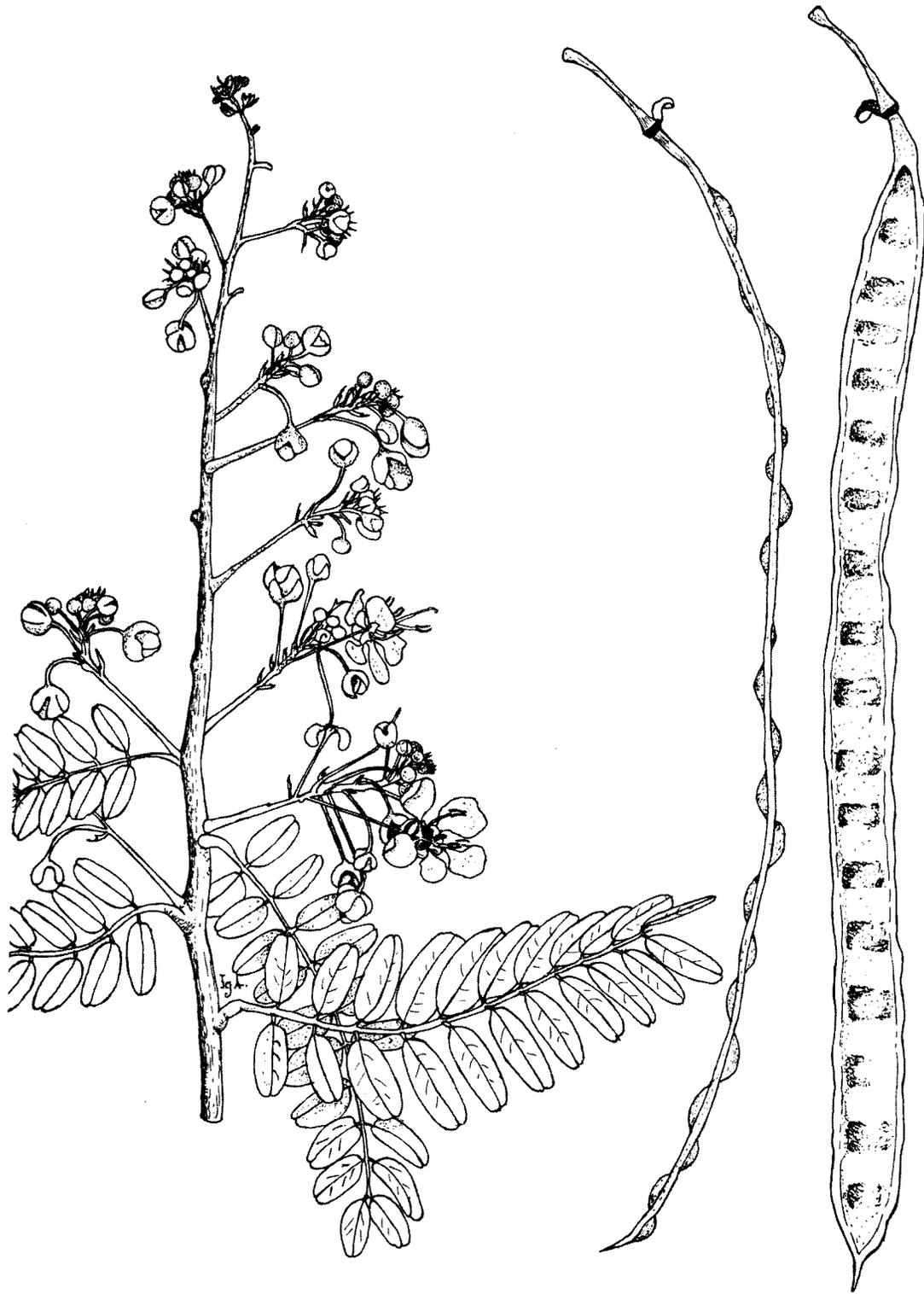
Other common names

kassod-tree, kolomona; casia de Siam (Puerto Rico)

Botanical synonym

Sciacassia siamea (Lam.) Britton

This species is known for its showy flowers in late summer after most legumes cease blooming. However, other species are more attractive generally.



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Flowering twig (left), fruits (right) $\frac{2}{3}$ X (P.R. v. 1).