

KERALA

State Flower: Kanikonna, Konna, Svarnaviram (Malayalam).

Botanical Name: *Cassia fistula* L.

Family: Leguminosae: Caesalpinioideae.

Common Names: Honalu, Sonaroo (Assam); Amaltes, Sondala (Bengali); Indian Laburnum, Purging Cassia (English); Garamala, Garmalo (Gujarathi); Amaltes, Bandarlauri, Girimala, Sonhali (Hindi); Aragvadha, Kakke (Kannada); Kakkayi (Konkani); Amaltas, Bahava, Karamala (Marathi); Ali, Amaltas, Kair (Punjabi); Aragwadha (Sanskrit); Arakkuvadam, Konnai, Sarakonrai (Tamil); Aragvadamu, Kondrakaya, Rela (Telugu).

Etymology: A name 'kassia', used by Dioscorides from a Hebrew name quetsi'oth, used by Linnaeus for *Cassia fistula*; specific epithet 'fistula' means a pipe, in allusion to the shape of the fruit.



Description: A deciduous tree, up to 25 m tall; trunk to 1.8 m in diam.; bark smooth, grey, exfoliating in woody scales up to 1.5 cm thick. Leaves paripinnate, 20 – 40 cm long; leaflets 4 – 8 pairs, oblong or ovate, 5 – 15 cm long, clothed with caducous, silvery pubescence when young. Flowers in axillary, pendulous, lax racemes. Petals 5, bright yellow. Pods cylindrical, up to 60 × 2.5 –

3 cm, pendulous, smooth, hard, dark brown or black; seeds 40 – 100, biconcave, 0.7 – 1 × 0.5 – 0.7 cm, hard, smooth, shiny, light brown, embedded in sweetish pulp.

Flowering & Fruiting: Throughout the year; more profuse during February – May.

Distribution: Native to Southeast Asia; found in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, South and SW China, Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan and other tropical Asian countries, some parts of Australia and tropical Africa; elsewhere cultivated. In India, it occurs throughout the country, including Andamans.

Economic Importance: Timber is used as a substitute for teak and sal. It is used for house-posts, fine cabinet work, bridge-posts and electric poles. Bark is used for tanning. Leaves are sometimes used as fodder and green manure. Flowers are cooked as vegetable.

Medicinal Uses: Plant is used in snakebite and scorpion sting. Bark has tonic and antidysenteric properties, and leaves possess antiperiodic and laxative properties.

Traditional Uses: Bark and fruits are used in traditional systems of medicine.

Ceremonial Uses: The flowers are of ritual importance in the Vishu festival, which is considered as the first day of zodiac calendar of Kerala. The Vishukkani is inseparable from Vishu. According to the age-old belief, an auspicious kani (first sight) at dawn on the Vishu day is lucky for the entire year.

Propagation: It can be propagated by seeds. Seeds kept under dormancy for one year or so germinate more readily.

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