

PUDUCHERRY

State Flower: Cannon-ball Tree.

Botanical Name: *Couroupita guianensis* Aubl.

Family: Lecythidaceae.

Common Names: Bili (Gujarati); Shivalingi, Top-gola-vriksh (Hindi); Nagalingam, Nagalingamaram (Malayalam, Tamil).

Etymology: *Couroupita* is the Latinized form of (French) Guiana vernacular name, 'kouroupitoumou' or 'couroupito-utoumou'; specific epithet, **guianensis** refers to its native, Guiana in northern South America.



Description: Tree, to 15 m tall. Leaves oblong, obovate, elliptic or broadly lanceolate, more or less entire at margins, acute at apex, 10 - 16 × 4 - 6 cm. Inflorescence a raceme, to 70 cm long, terminal and axillary, borne on branches and trunk. Flowers 8 - 15 cm across, showy, fragrant. Calyx tube top-shaped, 6-lobed. Petals 6, oblong-ovate, 3 - 5 × 2 - 3 cm, fleshy, yellow and red-

tinged or rosy purple. Androphore large, spatulate, cream-coloured; stamens many in 2 rows. Ovary 5 - 7-loculed; ovules many in each locule; stigmatic disk stellate. Fruits globose, 15 - 20 cm, hard outside, pulpy inside, reddish brown; seeds many, embedded in pulp.

Flowering & Fruiting: March - August.

Distribution: A native of Guyana, but extends over the whole of Central America; also found in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and cultivated elsewhere.

Economic Importance: It is grown as an ornamental tree in gardens for its large rosy purple flowers and large globular fruits. Wood is used as fuel.

Medicinal Uses: Fruit pulp is used to cure headache. Leaf juice is applied externally for hair growth.

Ceremonial Uses: In India, the tree is considered sacred to Hindus. A ring of stamens clustered into a (staminal) hood-like structure at the centre of flower, has the resemblance of serpent-head over the Shiva lingam hence the name Nagalingam.

R.G. Vadhyar

Botanical Survey of India, Southern Regional Centre, TNAU Campus, Lawley Road, Coimbatore.