## **PUDUCHERRY**

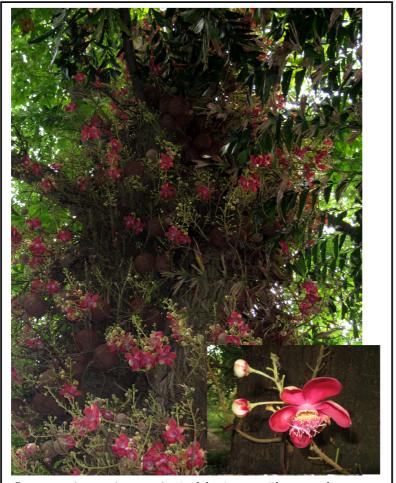
State Flower: Cannon-ball Tree.

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.



Couroupita guianensis Aubl.; inset: Flower close-up

**Description**: Tree, to 15 m tall. Leaves oblong, obovate, elliptic or broadly lanceolate, more or less entire at margins, acute at apex,  $10 - 16 \times 4 - 6$  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, 6lobed. Petals 6, oblongovate, 3 - 5  $\times$  2 - 3 cm. fleshy, yellow and redtinged or rosy purple. Androphore large, spathulate, 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.

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