

# Plant of the Month

April  
2024

**Common Name:** Silk Floss Tree

**Scientific Name:** *Ceiba speciosa*

**Family:** Malvaceae

**Etymology**

**Genus:** *Ceiba* – is derived from an indigenous Brazilian name for the tree.

**Species epithet:** *speciosa* – from the latin for beautiful or showy

## Distribution

The species is native to Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and southern Brazil.

## Native Habitat

Tropical and subtropical forests.

## Description

Deciduous tree with a bright-green trunk, studded with thick conical thorns, that turns grey with age. Leaves are compound and palmate with five to seven leaflets. Trees can develop large buttress roots that help support the umbrella like canopy.

## Flowers

The large flowers (10 -15 cm diameter) are creamy-whitish in the centre and pink towards the tips of their petals. Flowers are held at the end of the branches making them easy for flying pollinators to find and creating a spectacular show in the garden or forest.

## Fruit

The fruits are lignous, ovoid pods, 20 cm long, which contain bean-sized black seeds surrounded by a mass of fibrous, fluffy material reminiscent of cotton or silk.

## Location in Garden

Tropical Garden, edge of Australian Rainforest and opposite in Bed 60.

## Information

Regularly cited as one of the most spectacular trees in the world, the Silk Floss Tree has become a popular ornamental tree in warmer climates. It is in the same family as Hibiscus and Boab trees, sharing the showy flowers of the former and curious trunk, especially when young, of the latter.

It is closely related to the Kapok tree (*Ceiba pentandra*) and like the Kapok, produces masses of water repellent cotton-like fluff surrounding but not attached to the seeds. This material although inferior in quality to the Kapok has been traditionally used for insulation and stuffing fabrics. The wood can be used to make canoes, as wood pulp and to make paper. Oil can be extracted from the seed for use in cooking and as a fuel.

Flowers are showy, rich in nectar and as their size and position on the outside of the canopy suggest, they are pollinated by flying mammals and birds. The related Kapok is pollinated by bats and it is likely that bats and birds are the main pollinators of this species. Grey headed flying foxes at night and nectar feeding birds during the day are often seen on our trees.

