

Native Trees of Costa Rica A-Z

Aceituno

Not to be confused with aceituna (olive), it is a medium-sized tree with smooth bark. They were once exported to the USA to produce molds, but have since been replaced by white pine.

Almendro (Almond)

A popular shade and ornamental tree. The wood is unusually hard and the fruit and seeds are edible. The young saplings are a favorite to ants. We spray ours with Basadin (available at local garden stores).

Balsa

Also known as balso, it's a medium sized, straight tree. The wood has been used due to its strength and lightness. It's been used for model airplanes, floats and dental molds. The Indigenous use it to craft their [masks](#). It was even used for British bombers in the Second World War.

Bálsamo

Also known as sandalo, this large tree has been used for shade for coffee and pharmaceuticals. In Costa Rica, its use is more common for floors due to its strength and color.

Casco de venado

Translated as "Deer hooves", the name comes from the leaves which partially split into two look like hooves. There are several different varieties. It's a small to medium sized tree good for shade. The ants like this one too.

Caña fistula

A small to medium sized tree with beautiful yellow flowers. Originally from Asia, these are now quite common in Costa Rica and like drier climates. Also known as "Cassia llunia de oro" (Golden shower cassia), it is considered one of the more beautiful flowering trees in the world.

Cedro amargo - (Cedar)

A large tree which produces valuable wood. The pleasant odor makes it naturally highly resistant to insects.

Cedro dulce

Also a large tree, this species is softer and more difficult to work with. It is not insect resistant, at least not as a sapling.

Cocobolo

A small to medium sized tree with beautiful dark-green leaves. The beautiful wood is so beautiful and popular among artisans that it quite valuable and very scarce. It needs to be protected.

Cortez Amarillo (Yellow bark)

Grows to medium size. It is one of the more common and popular flowering trees. The wood is dark, heavy, durable and resistant.

Cristóbal

This tree is in danger of extinction! It grows very slowly. The wood is attractive for furniture and in high demand. It's a favorite for marimba keys due to the resonant sound.

Gallinazo

These grow fast and tall, and have noticeable purple-blue flowers. They are commonly found in secondary forests and do best in low, humid climates. Its wood was at one time exported to the US.

Guanacaste

This is Costa Rica's national tree and grows to an enormous size (up to 2.5 meters in diameter!). There are various varieties and uses vary from food and shade trees for cattle to wood for building.

Guapinol (Brazilian Cherry, *Hymenaea courbaril*) *sap incense

Brazilian cherry is a large canopy tree, sometimes reaching a height of 150 feet in the natural rainforest, with a cylindrical trunk up to 6 feet in diameter and a clear bole of 60 to 80 feet. The tree has a smooth gray bark that exudes a gum sometimes used for medicinal purposes. Brazilian cherry is leguminous, or nitrogen-fixing.

Guarumo

These can also grow quite tall. Their large leaves have been used in building materials, table ornaments and for a variety of medicinal purposes including weight loss. Some varieties have seeds that attract birds. Others are popular habitats for ants. (Just cut off a branch and watch them fall out!)

Ciprés (Cypress)

These have been introduced primarily in high altitude areas as ornamental trees and for wind protection. The wood is good for construction and furniture, but the tree is most popularly known for its use as Christmas trees.

Elequeme (Poró)

There are several varieties of Poro with slender, orange flowers. The bean-like seeds have a strong red color. Commonly used as live fence (cerca viva).

Espavel

The fruit is like a small marañon and sweet and delicious. The bark is used to intoxicate fish for consumption. The tree is very tall and commonly found by rivers in low, hot climates.

Eucalipto (Eucalyptus)

There are different varieties but they are not native to the Americas. The delicious smelling leaves are used for ornaments and infusions.

Fruta de pan (Bread Fruit)

Found in low climates, they do well in both dry and wet areas. The large, elliptical fruits are great for slicing up and frying!

Güititi (pronounced Witite)

Another common tree, the güitite has a corky, spongy bark which makes it ideal for your orquídes and other epiphytes. It can be propagated with branch cuttings. The yellow fruits attract birds.

Higo (Fig)

This bush-sized tree is not native to Costa Rica but has been planted in gardens for its leaves and fruit. Sweet, dried figs can sometimes be found in markets. The leaves are sometimes used to make "chiverre", giving it pleasing taste and aroma.

Indio Denudo (Naked Indian)

This is one of the easiest trees to identify with its reddish, peeling bark. It is commonly used for live fences. In Mexico, its wood has been used to make matches, in Costa Rica for weight loss.

Itabo

Used as an ornamental plant/tree to prevent erosion. Its flower is edible and considered by some as a delicacy in salads or with tuna. Be careful to only cook the flower petals. Other parts will make the food very bitter.

Jacaranda

(Remember, J's in Spanish are pronounced like H's) - It's actually native to Argentina but now commonly found in Costa Rica as an ornamental tree. A row of Jacarandas can be seen lining the road on the south end of La Sabana Park in San Jose.

Jicaro

A good shade tree, these do well in dry climates. The large, green, hard-shelled fruits serve for many purposes from food and juice to containers, bowls and spoons, as well as artistic ornaments.

Jobo

The young leaves are edible and if you happen to have a nearby monkey population, the small fruits a favorite.

Jocote

Commonly used for live fences due to their fast growth, their fruits are popular and are sold in the markets. The fruit can be used to make a marmalade called "Jocotada".

Lagarto and Largarillo

These come in a variety of species, some medium and some tall. Some have thorns and some do not. Some have thorns only when the tree is young. We have not yet been able to identify our young tree, but it does provide small fruits which attract lots of birds.

Laurel de la India

This is one of the more common trees and certainly one of the easiest to identify. The leaves are dark and green all year round and are commonly seen trimmed into various shapes. Be careful when planting these near any construction such as a road or a pool because the roots are known lift up the cement. It is a great shade tree.

Laurel Negro (Laurel del campo)

The wood from this tree is very resistant to insects. It has been commonly used for shade trees on coffee plantations and for reforestation. The tree often has growths on its branches which house ants.

Limon acido (Limon agrio)

There are different species of limon acido but only one of the limon dulce. Limon dulce is commonly eaten like an orange. But it is the limon acido varieties that are used for juices, fish, party beverages, cooking, etc. It is actually native to Indonesia. Ants love citrus tree leaves so you should take some preventative measures.

Llama del bosque

This a hardy tree which does well in dry and wet climates as well as high and low altitudes. Its beautiful red-orange flowers make it a favorite! Although it grows fast, it is supposed to have a relatively short life and it's a bit weak so shouldn't be planted by buildings.

Lorito

There are several species of Lorito. One is easy to recognize because it is the only native species in rainy, middle altitudes that has bipinnate leaves. But it is small and has no economic value. The tall species of Lorito (also known as Ardillo) has an excellent quality wood used for floors, doors and furniture. In the Osa Peninsula, you can find them up to 2m in diameter. The third species is medium in height and its wood is light, hard and used for furniture and building details.

MaderonNegro

It is commonly used for live fences, coffee plantation shade trees, and bases for small constructions. The wood is very hard and resistant to rotting.

Madroño

This is Nicaragua's national tree. It produces a fine wood, its bark is used to treat stomach ulcers, and its flowers are used to make a tea to treat for diarrhea.

Malinche

This tree is native to Madagascar but is now popular in Costa Rica for its red-orange flowers. Its light brown seeds have been used for making necklaces and bracelets.

Mamon

Native to northern South America, the mamon has been planted in Costa Rica for its shade and fruit. Green mamon stays green even in relatively dry climates. Mamon Chino is commonly found in local market and is grown in low, humid climates. Both have small sweet fruits to suck on. The name comes from the word "mamar" which means to suck. Supposedly, the seed can also be toasted and eaten.

Mango

This fruit tree is originally from SE Asia but has become part of the traditional food culture of Costa Rica. It has been produced principally in the Pacific zones for export and local consumption. There are many varieties including manga, el criollo, and el anis.

Manzana de agua

Known for its juicy, red, spongy fruits, which are commonly found at local farmers' markets and roadside stands. Our trees produce flowers and fruits biannually.

Manzana rosa

The fruits of this tree are appreciated for their delicate taste and aroma. This tree grows in almost any soil and can be planted from seeds or cuttings. The leaf is used for eye infections, fever and rheumatism. The roots have been used for epilepsy.

Marañon

The single seed (cashew) from each fruit is toasted. But locally, the fruit is eaten or the juice sucked out and the seed thrown away. Beware because the juice leaves permanent stains.

Naranja agria (sour oranges)

It is used for everything from making juice and marmalade to cleaning chickens. It is also used as the base for grafting sweet lemons (limon dulce).

Naranja or Naranja dulce (sweet orange)

The fruit is similar to the naranja agria but more yellow, with a solid center and a sweet pulp. A variety of this, the Washington, is from Brazil and has no seeds.

Nispero

The wild Nispero has smaller fruits than the commercial variety which has larger, very sweet fruits. Its wood is used in docks due to its resistance to marine organisms.

Nogal

Originally from the Old World, these trees grow very large and produce edible, but hard to crack nuts.

Papaya

This tree is exceptionally valuable in the tropics for its nutritional value and continuous production. You can buy them at any local market and plant the seeds. Be choosy and wait until you find one that is to your liking before planting. There is an insect which injects its eggs into the fruit. The larva later causes it to rot inside. We use the insecticide, Basudin, every few weeks (more frequently in the rainy season) with good results.

Peine de Mico (Comb of the Monkey)

The edible fruits resemble a comb. The seeds contain oil which can be used to treat rheumatism. The bark fiber has been used to make rope.

Pejibaye (peach palm)

The fruits are boiled, peeled and eaten with mayonnaise. The trees are quite tall and the bark is covered with nasty sharp thorns.

Pino aguja (Needle Pine)

These have been introduced primarily in high altitude areas as ornamental trees and for wind protection. The wood is good for construction and furniture, but the tree is most popularly known for its use as Christmas trees.

Poró Poro

This tree has nothing in common with the Poró. It is a small to medium height tree with beautiful yellow flowers. It is found in medium and low altitudes and does well in both dry and humid climate. The wood is soft and not particularly useful although it has been said that the bark is used for making rope and "chicha".

Roble de sabana

This is the national tree of El Salvador and is appreciated for its explosive flowering in the dry season. It sheds its leaves and its crown fills with white and pink flowers. The wood is clear and its appearance is similar to that of the Quercus Roble, hence, that is where it gets its name.

Ron-ron

This is an endangered tree! Its wood is highly value due to its heaviness, resistance to rotting, and beautiful coloring. Found in both dry and humid climates. It is easily identifiable due to its pleasant smelling, reddish leaves.

Saragundi

It is identifiable by its oblong leaves in 2 to 12 pairs and 10cm long. They are most commonly found in low, humid climates. They are often used for temporary shade for young trees and nurseries. The leaves close at night. The leaves are used as a popular medicine for arthritis.

Tamarindo

The tree grows to a large size. The leaves come with 10 to 18 pairs of leaflets. The pulp is used to make a poplar fruit drink and easy to conserve and also available in most stores all year. Found in low elevations of both dry and humid climates.

Tempisque

This is another scarce and threatened species and found mostly in northeast Guanacaste and Puntarenas. It can also be found in Santa Ana and Ciudad Colon, but with less frequency. The wood is hard and resistant to decay. It has been used for fence posts, construction and wood crafting. The fruit is edible.

Vainillo

These are perhaps the most common and hardy of the dry climate trees. They seem to be able to grow anywhere and in the dry season, there is an abundance of beautiful yellow flowers. You won't likely have to buy these...they are found everywhere. They have been used for firewood, live fences and shade trees for coffee.