

Central and South America

Common names: **English:** Rain tree, monkey pod, saman tree, cow tamarind.

Ecology: Occurs most commonly in open country and along streams in forests in Central America and extending into the northern parts of South America. In Uganda, it can grow in all areas below 1,300 m and will grow equally well in sandy soils and in heavy clays.

Uses: Firewood, charcoal, timber, tools, carving, food (sweet pulp of pods), fodder (pods, seeds), shade, ornamental (avenue tree), nitrogen fixation, gum, resin.

Description: A conspicuous **semi-deciduous tree** to 25 m tall when mature with a short, thick trunk. Its **branches spread horizontally** reaching an amazing 30 m occasionally. **BARK:** distinctive yellow to cream-brown, smooth. **LEAVES:** fern-like foliage, bipinnate leaves at the end of branches 25-40 cm long, with 2-4 pairs of pinnae, the 3-8 pairs of leaflets bright green, oblong, to 6 cm long, longest pairs at the end of the stalk. **FLOWERS:** **large stalked heads**, each flower with **fluffy pink stamens** from a cream-yellow base, 3-5 cm across, often in flower in the dry season. **FRUITS:** **pods to 20 x 2 cm, thick, straight, green then black, with an edible sticky pulp** around the seeds. Pods do not break open.

Propagation: Seedlings.

Seed: No. of seeds per kg: 5,000-7,400.

treatment: immerse seed in hot water for three minutes, allow to cool and soak for 24 hours.

storage: seed can be stored for six months.

Management: Fast growing in good conditions; it matures in a few years.

Remarks: Attractive in flower, is often evergreen and provides excellent shade. In some countries the well-figured timber is valued for furniture and carving. The leaves fold inward at night, in cool weather and in rain during the day—hence the name "rain tree".

