

Expanding Tree Diversity in Hawai'i's Landscapes

Ashoka, Yellow Saraca *Saraca thaipingensis*

The Yellow Saraca (also listed as *Saraca cauliflora* and *S. declinata*, the latter typically misapplied) is a slow-growing, medium-sized tree that can reach 35 feet tall at maturity by about 30 feet in diameter with a rounded crown.

Its yellow flowers are borne in showy clusters on the trunk and main branches in late winter. The large leaves hang limply as they emerge, like pinkish handkerchiefs before filling out.

The tree is associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Medicinal uses have also been made of extracts of bark and leaves.

Recommended Use in Landscape

- Specimen, also in large containers
- Accent
- Courtyards
- Shade
- Massed for forested effect

Distribution

- Native to SE Asia, Malaysia, Indonesia
- Rainforest, near streams

Propagation Techniques

- Seed
- Air layers
- Cuttings, with difficulty



Cultural Requirements and Tolerances

- Grows in partially shaded conditions
- Best in rich, well-drained soil, slightly acidic
- Likes humidity and moisture
- Prune for good structure when young
- Not salt tolerant

Flower and Fruit Characteristics

- Flowers borne in loose clusters on main stems. Flowers lack petals, and the showy part consists of 4 calyx lobes of golden yellow and a tube about an inch long. Calyx darkens as it ages. Most flowers are male with prominent stamens. Fragrant.
- Fruits, when formed, are large flat pods, dark red to purple when young, and maturing to 8 inches long. Seeds are about 1½ inches in size.

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Inflorescence of *S. declinata*, a related species known as Red Saraca, whose flowers turn red as they age. This name is often misapplied to *S. thaipingensis*.

Leaf Characteristics

- Dark green leaves are pinnately compound, with 4-8 pairs of elliptical leaflets. Overall length up to 16 inches. Leaves are pinkish and pendulous when first emerging.

Advantages of Use in Landscapes

- Moderate size allows for a variety of uses
- Highly shade tolerant
- HPWRA 2, low potential for invasiveness
- Rare in residential use

Disadvantages of Use in Landscapes

- Needs shaping when young to train disorganized growth
- Not suited for coastal conditions