Chorisia speciosa or Ceiba speciosa

Floss Silk Tree

By Julia Pollex
Formly known as Bombacaceae Family

Known now to be in the Malvaceae family.

(Recently found not to be monophyletic)

Commonly known as the Cotton-Tree family or the Bombax family.
In general it likes:

* Full Sun

* Tolerant of most types of soil, especially soils with high Ph, as long as it drains well.

* Temperatures above 27°F. Goes deciduous below.

Hardy to 20°F if established or has some protection.
Large palmately compound leaves divided into 5-7 pointed leaflets.

Alternate pattern.
Flowers

Flowering time ranges anywhere from September thru November. All depends on environmental factors.

Hibiscus like.

Colors range in varying shades of pinks. Other Chorisia bloom in whites and yellows.
Characterized by

A pistil consisting of a superior ovary, a long, usually white, style and topped by a spherical, cream-colored stigma.

The fusion of five stamens surrounds the style. The anthers looks like a crown.
Huge range of diversity of flowers Chorisia speciosa.
Inappropriate watering schedule can inhibit blooming, but if irrigated properly the blooms can be prolific.

In general they respond well to deep monthly watering during the growing season.

Once summer hits lessen the volume of water or none at all.
Fruit is a capsule. It can be described as Avocado or pineapple guava shaped. May grow six to eight inches in length.

Once the capsule is completely ripe the capsule fall away to reveal masses of silky white hairs. This flossy silk resembles cotton.
When released, these silky hairs help to disperse the seeds in strong winds.
The floss-silk provided soft, springy filler for pillows. One of its close relatives is better known for its commercial use of silk.
The Trunk

In younger trees, the trunk is usually smooth and very green due to its high chlorophyll content.

Stem emergences are absent on new stems but develop on one to two-year-old stems.

Big time participant in Bark photosynthesis.
Not called thorns or spines, rather these sharp projections are called either:

**Trunk prickles,**

**Bark prickles,** or

**Stem emergences.**

— they are outgrowths from stem tissues.
As a tree ages the stem emergences go from green quickly to brown to permanently gray.

It’s a softwood; as long as it’s pruned early to have a strong central leader it should be strong and safe.
*Young trees start out growing fast, straight, and narrow, then slowly develop broadly spreading canopies as they age.

*It can grow 3-5 ft per year when young. At maturity it has been recorded to reach 60 feet.

*Base of tree becomes exaggerated with age.
Locations not recommended for use.
***Compacted soils. Unless you work around with lifting above soil level.

***Mainly shade.

*Over watered situations – not good in lawns; doesn’t compete well with turf.

***Areas with no protection from frost/freeze during establishment

*Near children playground/play areas

*Near tripping hazards or heavy trafficked area. Typically not a street tree, but grafted varieties work well.
Best uses:

* Specimen tree in landscape.
* Exotic looking tree for a quick tropical effect.
* Companion plant for cacti/succulent gardens and other drought tolerant landscapes.
* Parking structures; great protection from the cold!
Living sculpture – when leafless you can really appreciate its natural form and the green fruits it bares.
Bonsai or in mass.
Pests and disease

Spider mite can be an issue if in compacted soil or shaded. Other then that it is virtually a pest/disease free tree.

Right plant, Right place!
Varieties

One grafted clone called 'Los Angeles Beautiful' has wine-red flowers, and 'Majestic Beauty' has rich pink flowers.

MB grown frequently in Northern California.

‘Los Angeles Beautiful’
In their natural habitat, different species of Chorisia overlap in bloom time, therefore a strong hybrid zone exists as does many opportunities for nature and botanist to create new hybrids. The variability of flower color is grand and many people love hybridizing this genus as a hobby because they never know what they will get.
Little scientific research has been done to understand the evolutionary adaptations of this tropical tree genus.

Most likely the primary roles of stem emergences are for defense against herbivory.

Example of Convergent Evolution?

LOTS of genetic variation in the species; especially in the flowers.
Chorisia insignis – White Floss Silk Tree
Family ties- *Ceiba pentandra*

**Kapok or Cotton Tree**

Formerly widely used for stuffing pillows, bases and balls for baseball and softball, mattresses, and, especially, life jackets.

The fibers water resistant and support as much as 30 times their weight in water. During World War II, U.S. sailor’s referred to life jacket’s as a "kapok." Since the war, however, synthetic fibers have replaced kapok for these traditional uses.
Ceiba pentandra

*Kapok or Cotton Tree*

Needs consistent water – don’t let dry out.

Buttress crown.

 Doesn’t perform well here; needs more consistent warmth and moisture.
**Pseudobombax ellipticum** – Shaving Brush Tree

This tree has the green and gray stripes on its bark but totally lacks the stem emergences. Its flowers are unusual in having showy stamens rather than showy petals.
Full Sun to part shade.

Blooms mid spring to late summer.

Drought tolerant.

From Central America.

Small tree; 10-25’ tall and equal spread.

Much less hardy; dies back when temps get below 30°F. Needs protection to survive.
References

US Department of Agriculture – Natural Resource Conservation Service – NRCS.

University of Florida – Plant Sciences Department.

Palm ter nursery- Girona, Spain.

The Tropical Flowering Tree Society.

Desert-tropics Nursery

Chrsity Smith – Curator of the Stanford Arizona Garden.