



BALSA WOOD
(*Ochroma pyramidale*)

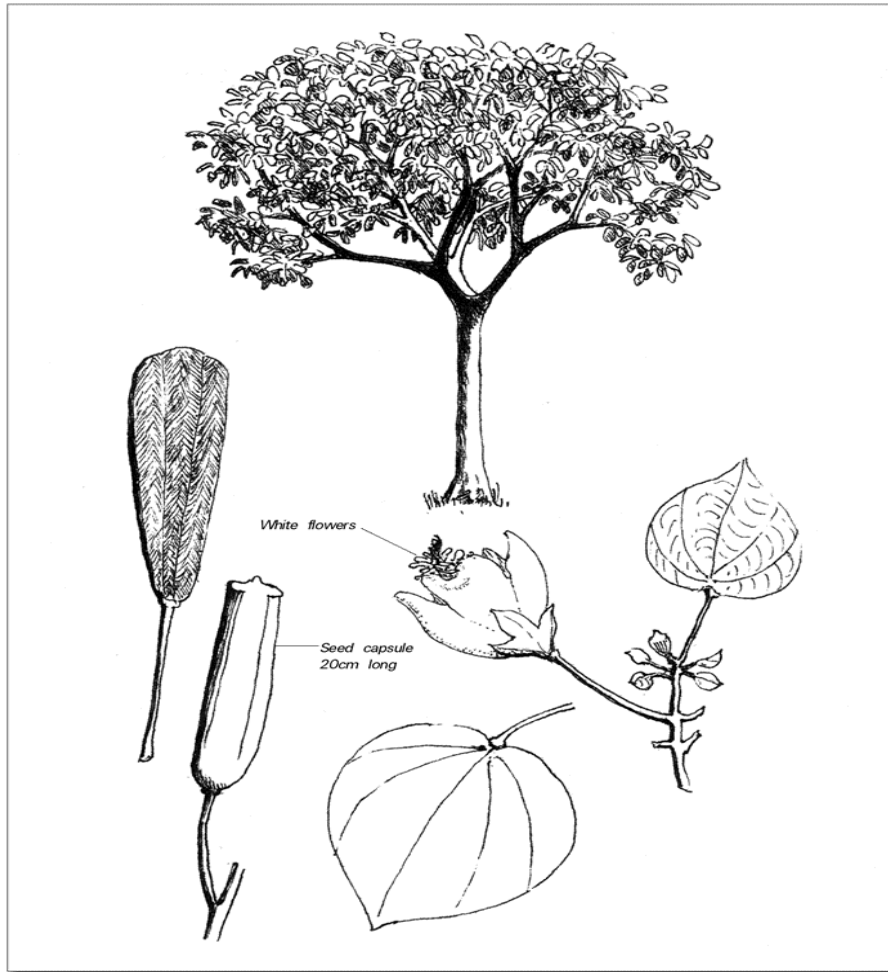
The Balsa is also called Down Tree and Corkwood. It is a native of northern South America, Central America and West Indian Islands like Trinidad & Tobago and St. Vincent & the Grenadines where it is called bafflo. In Jamaica, the tree has been recorded in Jack's Hill, upper St. Andrew, near Castleton, Gordon Town, near Port Morant in St. Thomas, Manchester, St. Ann and the John Crow Mountains where it is fairly common.

Balsa is a member of the Silk Cotton tree family, Bombacaceae. The shape of the leaves is somewhat like that of the Blue Mahoe, the latter being smaller in size. The flowers are 10 cm in diameter and 20 cm in length, creamy-white and bell shaped. The pod is shaped like an enlarged rabbit's foot whilst the "downs" are very much like rabbit's fur and are attached to small seeds.

The wood is pinkish-white to brownish with a rather silky lustre and is soft and spongy. Balsa wood is among the lightest known commercial woods. In the 1914-1918 war, balsa wood became very important and large quantities were used in the manufacture of life-preservers, submarine floats, parts of lifeboats, aeroplanes and for insulating refrigerators. The wood is also used by fisher men for making fishing-net floats. The down was once used for stuffing pillows and mattresses whilst the bark can be made into ropes.

BALSA WOOD (*Ochroma pyramidale*)

Family: Bombacaceae	Species: <i>Ochroma pyramidale</i>	Author: (Cav.) Urb.
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Height: 20m	Habitat: Wet forest, 150-1000m	Persistence: Evergreen
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