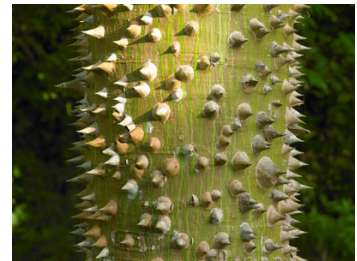


March Jewels, 2008

This month's jewels are the kapok and its relatives, the floss silk tree and the silk cotton tree. I've heard a lot of reference to these the last few months, and noted the confusion of names. When not in bloom, they appear very similar. All kapok relatives have the same spiny trunk, which is green while the tree is young. And all have large green seed



pods filled with a cottony down. This is a good time to discuss their differences, though, since the most spectacular of the trio is in full bloom this month. *Bombax ceiba*, the silk cotton tree, is a kapok relative native from India to Australia. Its large, red, waxy flowers cover the tree and the ground beneath it during February and March. Make sure you have plenty of room if you want to plant one. They grow fast, eventually reaching 75 feet high, with trunks many feet in diameter, and buttress roots that spread out from the trunk. Not a good choice right next to the driveway or the house.



The floss silk tree, *Chorisia speciosa*, is a pink flowered tree from Brazil and Argentina. There is also a white flowered species from Argentina, *Chorisia insignis*. They are both very fast growing when young, but slow down as they age. They are very impressive specimen trees, a little better behaved than the silk cotton tree, but not quite as spectacular.



The true kapok, *Ceiba pentandra*, is from South America. Its flowers are creamy white, and much smaller than those of either the silk cotton or the floss silk tree. While its spiny trunk and seed pods filled with fluff may be impressive, its flowers really aren't.

All these members of the family Bombacaceae like abundant or regular water when young, becoming a little more drought tolerant when older. They generally drop their leaves before flowering. They need full sun, well drained soil, and lots of space!