

TREE SPECIES (SCIENTIFIC NAME)

Ochroma pyramidale

ENGLISH COMMON NAME

Balsa Wood

PERU COMMON NAME

Topa

TREE FAMILY

MALVACEAE

AVERAGE LEAF SIZE (CM)

24.5CM × **21.5CM**
Length Width

DISTRIBUTION

NATIVE TO PERU

NATIVE TO

Region: Americas
Latin America: Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Venezuela

ELEVATIONAL RANGE (M)

350–2000M

TREE HEIGHT

MEDIUM (20–35M)

COFFEE AGROFORESTRY INFORMATION

COFFEE SYSTEM

ARABICA

COFFEE IMPACT

BENEFICIAL TO COFFEE

CULTIVATION

PLANTED
NATURAL

PREVALENCE

Unknown

TREE MANAGEMENT

When the fruits open they form a cottony layer that looks like the "leg of a rabbit" and in which the seeds are wrapped. The seeds are dispersed mainly by the wind, but probably also by water, which is possible due to their floating fibers. The fruits are abundant, contain many small seeds (approx. 146 thousand per kg) and are collected with sticks just as they begin to open. You should let them open by exposing them to the sun and separating the cottony fiber from the seeds being careful not to breathe it. Soaking the seeds in water at room temperature for 24 hours supports germination (60%), which begins 8 days after sowing. Seeds stored at 20°C remain viable for more than 14 months. Growth in nursery is very fast. Seedlings can reach 25-30 cm in height in a time of 3 months. They require full light during their initial development and seeds need high temperatures to germinate. Under natural conditions, clearing forests exposes the soil to the sun and this triggers germination. In the nursery, seeds are sown in separate lines between 3 and 4 cm under a slight shade and in sterilized soil to prevent mold. Trees of this species partially drop their leaves for a very short period during the dry season. It is a fast-growing tree that prefers deep, fertile, moist but well-drained soil in a sunny position. It prefers a pH in the range of 5.5 - 6.5, tolerating 5 - 8. Highly sensitive to fire damage.

TREE BENEFITS AND USES

FARMER USES

Lumber, **Ornamental**, **Product**
Used in the construction of rafts, buoys, special packaging, models of airplanes and cars. They are used as an ornamental plant for their leaves and showy flowers. The cottony hairs of the fruit are used to make mattresses, life preservers and pillows. Balsa wood is the lightest commercial wood known, it has a wide range of applications, but it is probably best known as a material for making aircraft models.

FARM SERVICES

Coffee Shade, **Soil Improvement**
Soil Improvement: it is a fast-growing tree and used to rehabilitate degraded soils

BIODIVERSITY BENEFITS

YES

White-faced monkeys have been seen during the day poking their faces out on the flower, possibly looking for insects, and their faces are generously covered with pollen. The flowers can be visited by nocturnal mammals. Birds often cut holes near the base of flowers to get nectar.

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