INTRODUCTION

This large, spreading shrub from Argentina, very tender to frost, produces from late summer to fall, large spikes of golden-yellow flowers, opening from bottom to top (Fig. 1). Flower spikes look like golden candles when covered with unopened flower buds. Reaching a height of 10 to 15 feet with an equal spread, Candlebrush makes an attractive specimen shrub or small tree if it is properly trained.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Cassia alata
Pronunciation: KASS-ee-uh uh-LAY-tuh
Common name(s): Candlebrush
Family: Leguminosae
USDA hardiness zones: 10 through 11 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: container or above-ground planter; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; trainable as a standard; specimen
Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

DESCRIPTION

Height: 10 to 15 feet
Spread: 10 to 15 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette
Crown shape: oval
Crown density: open
Growth rate: fast
Texture: coarse

Figure 1. Mature Candlebrush.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: even pinnately compound
Leaflet margin: entire
Leaflet shape: oblong; obovate
Leaflet venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaflet blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy
**Cassia alata -- Candlebrush**

**Figure 2.** Shaded area represents potential planting range.

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**Flower**

*Flower color:* yellow  
*Flower characteristics:* fall flowering; summer flowering; very showy

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**Fruit**

*Fruit shape:* pod  
*Fruit length:* 6 to 12 inches  
*Fruit covering:* dry or hard  
*Fruit color:* brown  
*Fruit characteristics:* does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

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**Trunk and Branches**

*Trunk/bark/branches:* bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; no thorns  
*Pruning requirement:* requires pruning to develop strong structure  
*Breakage:* susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break  
*Current year twig color:* green  
*Current year twig thickness:* medium; thick

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**Culture**

*Light requirement:* tree grows in full sun  
*Soil tolerances:* clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained  
*Drought tolerance:* moderate

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**Other**

*Roots:* surface roots are usually not a problem  
*Winter interest:* no special winter interest  
*Outstanding tree:* not particularly outstanding  
*Invasive potential:* little, if any, potential at this time  
*Pest resistance:* long-term health usually not affected by pests
USE AND MANAGEMENT

Candlebrush grows rapidly in full sun on a wide range of soils. Pinching new growth increases branching, creating a fuller canopy which produces more flowers. Candlebrush produces the nicest flower display next year when it is pruned back hard in the spring. It makes a beautiful accent in a shrub border or planted as a specimen in a ground cover. Locate it near the patio or by an entryway for a stunning fall accent plant.

Propagation is by cuttings or seed, blooming the first year from seed.

Pests

Caterpillars can cause a problem for Candlebrush, eating the foliage and flower buds.

Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.