**Senna spectabilis**
*Cassia*

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

**INTRODUCTION**

Cassia is a medium to large tree from tropical America and reaches 60 feet in height, but is often much smaller (Fig. 1). The pinnately compound leaflets have fuzzy undersides and are three inches long. The bright yellow flowers are 1.5 inches wide but appear in dense racemes up to two feet long. The cylindrical seedpods which follow are 12 inches long.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scientific name:</th>
<th><em>Senna spectabilis</em></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation:</td>
<td>SEN-uh speck-TAB-ih-liss</td>
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<tr>
<td>Common name(s):</td>
<td>Cassia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family:</td>
<td><em>Leguminosae</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>USDA hardiness zones:</td>
<td>10B through 11 (Fig. 2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Origin:</td>
<td>not native to North America</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uses:</td>
<td>container or above-ground planter; large parking lot islands (&gt; 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (&gt;6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; trainable as a standard; small parking lot islands (&lt; 100 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Availability:</td>
<td>grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries</td>
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**DESCRIPTION**

- **Height:** 15 to 20 feet
- **Spread:** 15 to 20 feet
- **Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms
- **Crown shape:** round; vase shape
- **Crown density:** dense
- **Growth rate:** fast
- **Texture:** fine

**Foliage**

- **Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)
- **Leaf type:** odd 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

**Flower**

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

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** elongated; 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; persistent on the tree

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; not particularly showy; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; 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

**Culture**

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

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.
Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Cassia should be grown in full sun on well-drained soil. It appears to adapt to alkaline soil.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases of major concern.

USE AND MANAGEMENT

This tree is best used in an open, sunny, park-like setting where the bright flowers can be displayed and enjoyed. This will form a large mass of delicate foliage covered with yellow flowers for about two months each year. Lower branches often reach to the ground as they droop under the weight of the flowers. These branches can be removed to create clearance beneath the tree for pedestrians and vehicles. This would make the tree suited for planting along streets provided major branches were developed with good attachments to the trunk. Unpruned trees branch poorly, and large-diameter limbs often develop forming a coarse-textured branching structure. Regular heading back lateral branches as they develop from the trunk on small trees helps to create more branching and a more uniformly shaped crown. Occasional pruning during the life of the tree will help maintain this regular shape.

Figure 3. Foliage of Cassia.