



Royal Tree

ID # 364

An ironic twist to a Brazilian revolution

Most Royal Trees were cut down in Brazilian gardens following the 1817 revolution because their name was associated with the monarchy.

Ironically, the seeds of a Royal Tree planted in the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney by Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh in 1868 are being sent to Rio de Janeiro to help with species recovery.



The beautiful and tasty fruit is said to have a taste similar to the Star Apple to which it is closely related and were very much appreciated by the first emperor of Brazil, Pedro I and his son Pedro II who exported specimens to botanical gardens around the world, including Sydney, Lisbon and Buenos Aires.



Family: *Sapotaceae*

Genus: *Chrysophyllum*

Botanic name: *Chrysophyllum imperiale*

Also known as: Royal Tree; Empress Tree

Indigenous names: *Marmelleiro do matto*, *Guapeba*

Origin: Endemic to the Atlantic Forest ecoregion of eastern Brazil, native to vicinity of Rio de Janeiro.

Habitat: It is a component of lowland rainforest up to 800m altitude, where it grows to be a part of the canopy. It is losing its native habitat of forests around Rio de Janeiro and fast becoming an endangered species because of clearing and spreading urbanisation.

Description: Tropical tree growing up to 10-20m and naturally takes on a rounded crown shape. The trunk tends to be quite straight with furrowed light brown bark.



Large firm leaves have a broad rounded apex and a tapering base (35-45 cm) and a glossy green upper surface with rusty tinged new growth. They are smooth above and finely furred on the under surface, and have a prominent mid-rib. The leaf margins are serrated.



Creamy white flowers are produced in late springtime in loose clusters that mature to small, round, green fruits in autumn.



Propagation and cultivation: Because it is endangered in Brazil, there is now a group of people from several countries involved with the search for and preservation of specimens of this species and work to reproduce by seeds.

Uses: It is a large tree with very hard wood and was logged to build ships.



Sources:

gardendrum.com

<https://www.gardensonline.com.au>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chrysophyllum_imperiale