

Crescentia alata

Mexican Calabash, Jicaro, Morrito, Winged Calabash

Bignoniaceae

Flower Display: D



S.H. Brown

Comayagua, Honduras

Mid October

In Honduras, along the highway between San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa, the flatlands are sprinkled with *Crescentia alata*. It is a handsome tree in the open, with many, wide-spreading, upright branches. In this area of Honduras, it grows along side its close relative, *C. cujete*. The two species have apparently produced many hybrids, also commonly found along the roadways. Both Calabash species are similar in appearance and could easily be confused for each other. Compared to *C. cujete*, *Crescentia alata* has a more upright form, with much fewer criss-crossing branches, and possesses smaller fruits, and trifoliate leaves. Both species are cauliflorous, meaning that the flowers and fruits are attached directly to the trunk and branches. The bat-pollinated flowers open in the evening and many are spent by the early afternoon. In the sunlight, unopened flowers cling to the tree awaiting their turn for the evening opening. The fruits, hard, cannonball-like, may adorn the tree for up to seven months before turning yellow-green and eventually falling to the ground. Dried fruits were once commonly made into bowls, storage containers, and musical rattles known as maracas. The seeds are edible and high in protein with a licorice-like sweet taste. Although drought tolerant, it can withstand periodic



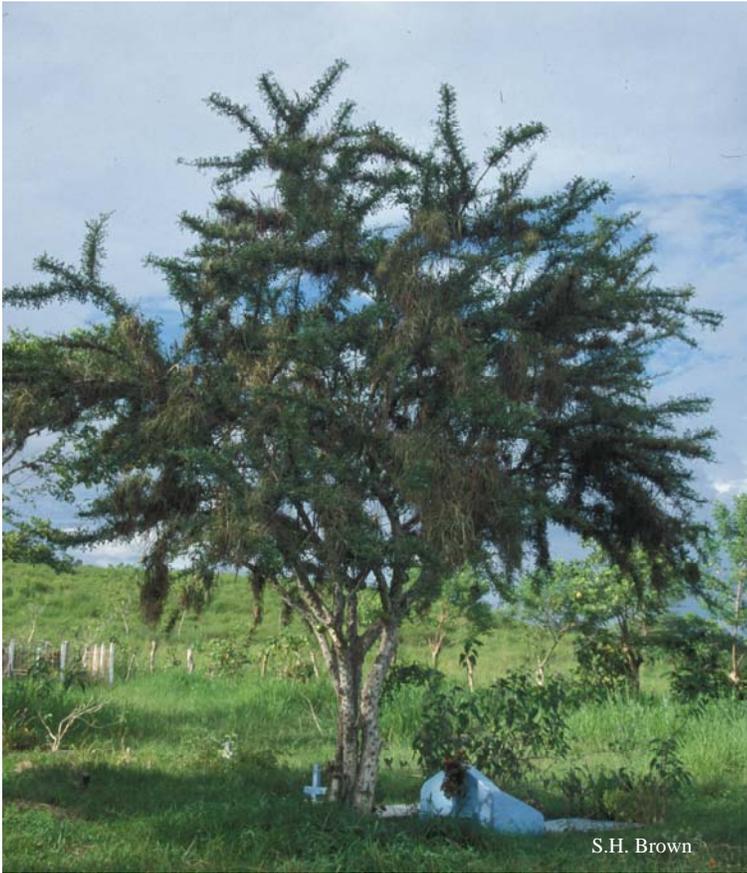
S.H. Brown

Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Early October

The cauliflorous flowers are attached directly to the branches and trunk

flooding during the rainy season. With an open canopy, and a rough bark, *C. alata* attracts many epiphytes. An excellent ornamental tree, it will first be noticed for its curious, persistent fruits, and less for its many, but fleeting, cauliflorous flowers.



Near Copán, Honduras

Mid October

A tree, crowded with epiphytes, grows in a local cemetery



S.H. Brown

Near Copán, Honduras

Mid October

The cauliflorous fruits grow directly on the branches and trunk



S.H. Brown

Northern Costa Rica

Early October

Upper and lower leaf surfaces and the life-stages of the flower

Leaves: Trifoliate, alternate or clustered, with large winged petioles (alata means “winged”), dark green, up to 8 inches long, leaflets oblanceolate

Flowers: Bell-shaped, solitary, yellow-green to maroon, on short stalk, to 2 ½ inches long

Fruits: Berries, nearly round, sometimes oval, hard-shelled, smooth, green to purple, becoming yellow-green before falling, commonly 4-5 inches in diameter

Mexican Calabash

Syn: *Parmentiera alata*

Origin: Southern Mexico to Costa Rica

Zone: 9a - 12b, 19°F minimum

Growth Rate: Medium

Flowering Month(s): Intermittently, May to November

Flowering Days: Not known

Leaf Persistence: Semi-deciduous, Deciduous

Messiness: Medium when flowering

Salt Tolerance: Medium

Drought Tolerance: High

Nutritional Requirements: Medium

Potential Pests: Beetles

Typical Dimension: 25'x30'

Uses: Container, Park, Shade, Specimen, Streetscape

Tropical Flowering Trees List
 Questions/Comments:
 Email: brownsh@leegov.com