

The Kapok Tree

A giant in the rainforests, the kapok tree can reach up to 200 feet in height, sometimes growing as much as 13 feet per year. Due to its extreme height, the kapok tree, towers over the other rainforest plants. Some of the trees have spines or conical thorns, giving the tree a menacing appearance. The trunk can expand to nine or 10 feet in diameter.



Who lives in the Kapok tree?

In the nooks and grooves of this huge plant live a diverse number of species including frogs, birds and bromeliads. The white and pink flowers of the kapok tree emit a foul odor that attracts bats. As the flying mammals move from flower to flower feasting on the nectar, they transfer pollen on their fur, thus facilitating pollination.

Habitat

The kapok tree is found throughout the Neotropics, from southern Mexico to the southern Amazon and even to parts of West Africa. Because the unopened fruit won't sink when submerged in water, many believe the fruit of the kapok tree floated its way from Latin America to Africa.

Significance to Humans

The majestic kapok tree has many uses for humans. Its wood is lightweight; good for making carvings and dugout canoes. The silky fibers that disperse the seeds are too small for weaving but make great stuffing for bedding and life preservers. Soaps can be made from the oils in the seeds. Other parts of the giant tree are used as medicines. In

ancient times, the Maya believed that the kapok tree stood at the center of the earth.