



**Scientific Name** *Anacardium occidentale* L.

**Common Names** Cashew tree, Caju, കശുമാവ്

**Family** Anacardiaceae

**Plant description** The cashew tree is large and evergreen, growing upto 14 metres (46 feet) tall, with a short, often irregularly shaped trunk. The leaves are spirally arranged, leathery textured, elliptic to obovate, 4–22 centimetres ( $1\frac{1}{2}$ – $8\frac{3}{4}$  inches) long. The flowers are produced in a panicle or corymb up to 26 cm (10 inches) long; each flower is small, pale green at first, then turning reddish, with five slender, acute petals 7–15 millimetres ( $\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{5}{8}$  inches) long. Its fruit is a pseudocarp with a part appearing to be fruit named Cashew apple and the true fruit being the Cashew nut, a kidney shaped drupe that grows at the end of cashew apple.

**Distribution** The species is native to Brazil, West Indies and tropical South America and later was distributed around the world in the 1500s by Portuguese explorers. They were introduced and cultivated in many tropical and subtropical regions of Africa, Australia and Asia, including India.

**Uses** Raw cashews have high nutritional value including 44% fat, 33% carbohydrates and 18% proteins. They are rich sources of

dietary minerals like Magnesium, Manganese, Cobalt and Phosphorus. Cashew nuts are a popular snack and ingredient in many cuisines. The mature cashew apple can be eaten fresh, cooked in curries, or fermented into vinegar, citric acid or an alcoholic drink. They are even used for making jams, juices and other products. Cashew nut oil is used for cooking and for salad dressing. Cashew shell oil is a strong irritant and is used in tropical folk medicine and for anti-termite treatment of timber. Its wood is valued for furniture, cabinetry and other purposes.

**Flowering and  
Fruiting time**

Cashew trees typically flower within 3-4 months after the onset of rainy season. Flowers bloom over a period of 5-6 weeks. The fruits take about 50-60 days to develop after flowering, and it takes another 20-30 days for the cashew apple to mature, depending on the ambient temperatures. The tree may flower twice a year, if there are two distinct dry seasons.