Hello Tasha,

Can you help me with a search problem?

I would like to grow a few Red Silk Cotton Trees in my family’s garden. I’ve heard that they can provide good economic benefits as well as food for the family. I want to read information about cultivating these trees.

The problem is that there are many different names that web pages use to refer to the Red Silk Cotton Tree. Not to mention that I am looking for information specifically about growing the tree in Senegal, so the useful pages might be in French, English, or Wolof.

If I am trying to read very widely about this tree, do I need to OR all of these different names together? It would look something like this query:

["red-flowered silk cotton tree" OR “red silk cotton tree” OR “gold coast bombax” OR kapokier OR bungkungo OR bunkungo OR garablaobe OR kattupa OR “bombax andrieu” OR “bombax buonopozense” OR “Bombax houardii” OR “bombax vuiletii”]

But when I tried that, I saw even more names that I had not included. It seems a bit overwhelming to manage.

Any ideas about how to simplify my process but still spread a pretty wide net for authoritative information?

Thank you,

Pape

Hi Pape,

To get you started, I would keep your query simple. You are right that complicated queries can be overwhelming.
You write that you are looking for “authoritative” sources of information. Later in the process, you might find personal experience stories, such as blog or forum posts, helpful, but it sounds like right now you are looking for more formal, botanical sources.

So, I think you have a great way to simplify your search. You are looking for information on a particular plant. No matter in what language these sources are written, I suspect that most of them will include the scientific name of the plant. Stick with that name and see how far you get. Searching for [red flowered silk cotton tree] returns results that suggest the term you want is [bombax buonopozense].

If you want to try something more open-ended, omit the species and simply search for the genus [bombax]. Make sure you are searching on Google’s Senegal domain (Google.sn) and you will have pretty targeted results. You can always make sure that you are getting information on trees that grow domestically by searching for [bombax senegal]. Both of those words appear on pages in English and in French, so you can use that one query to find pages in at least two of the languages that interest you. (I am not sure about Wolof—you tell me.)

Give it a try and tell me how it goes! Let me know if you have any further questions.

Thank you,
Tasha