**Cassia bahamensis** Bahama Cassia

Edward F. Gilman

**Introduction**

Bahama Cassia (also known as *C. chapmanii*) is a tall upright shrub that may reach a height of 3 to 9 feet (Fig. 1). Like many other Cassias, this shrub is covered with little yellow flowers in the fall which are quite attractive next to the dark green, compound leaves. Several kinds of butterflies, including the Sulfurs, are attracted to these 1/2- to 1-inch-wide flowers. Bahama Cassia is relatively short-lived and may begin to decline after only four or five years. However, this plant often has seedlings popping up nearby. This could be a mixed blessing by providing for a source of new plants and creating a potential weed problem.

**General Information**

**Scientific name:** *Cassia bahamensis*

**Pronunciation:** KASS-ee-uh baw-haw-MEN-sis

**Common name(s):** Bahama Cassia, Bahama Senna

**Family:** Leguminosae

**Plant type:** shrub

**USDA hardiness zones:** 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)

**Planting month for zone 10 and 11:** year round

**Origin:** native to Florida

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Uses: specimen; screen; border; mass planting; attracts butterflies; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size)

Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

Description

Height: 3 to 9 feet
Spread: 6 to 10 feet
Plant habit: upright; round
Plant density: moderate
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate
Leaf type: even-pinnately compound
Leaf margin: revolute
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow
Flower characteristic: fall flowering; winter flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated
Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches
Fruit cover: dry or hard

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**Fruit color:** brown

**Fruit characteristic:** showy

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; not particularly showy

**Current year stem/twig color:** brown

**Current year stem/twig thickness:** medium

**Culture**

**Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun

**Soil tolerances:** acidic; alkaline; sand; loam; clay;

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Soil salt tolerances:** good

**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

**Other**

**Roots:** usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

**Outstanding plant:** plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

**Invasive potential:** native plant that often reproduces into nearby landscapes

**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

**Use and Management**

In the sun, Bahama Cassia will be bushy and seldom exceeds a height of 3 to 5 feet; it will obtain a height of 9 feet in partial shade. This shrub prefers well-drained, acid, sandy soil and is drought tolerant. Prune the plant back to the ground in the spring every few years to rejuvenate it, or following a winter with freezing temperatures. Freezing temperature will usually kill all tissue above ground. The plant often sprouts back quickly in the spring in hardiness zone 9 and 10.

Cassia can be propagated by using seeds or cuttings.

**Pests and Diseases**

Bahama Cassia is not susceptible to any diseases of major concern. As with other Cassias, caterpillars may consume the leaves and flower buds, especially in the fall.

Bahama Cassia could be used in the landscape as a specimen planted by itself, or as a screen, hedge or border. In a sunny location it grows to about 8 feet tall so would make a nice background plant in a shrub border. Allow plenty of room for its rounded, spreading habit of growth. Plants can easily grow to become 6 to 10 feet wide.