

Tamarind

Tamarindus indica L.

Legume family (Leguminosae)

Post-Cook introduction

Tamarind is a handsome introduced shade tree of lowlands, mainly in dry areas, where it has escaped from cultivation. It has a dense crown of blue green feathery, pinnate leaves, showy pale yellow flowers tinged with red, giving a yellowish color to the tree, and thick brown pods with sour edible pulp. Cassia subfamily (Caesal-pinioideae).

Medium-sized evergreen tree to 40 ft (12 m) high and 2 ft (0.6 m) in trunk diameter, with rounded crown of dense foliage. Bark gray or brown, rough, thick, much fissured. Inner bark brownish, gritty, and slightly bitter. Twigs green and minutely hairy when young, turning gray or brown.

Leaves alternate, even pinnate, 2–4½ inches (5–11 cm) long, hairless, with slender pale green axis. Leaflets 10–18 pairs, close together and almost stalkless, oblong, ¾–7⁄8 inch (10–22 mm) long and ⅛–¼ inch (3–6 mm) broad, rounded at both ends and unequal at base, not toothed, thin, blue green above and slightly paler beneath, folding together against axis at night.

Flower clusters (racemes) terminal and lateral, 1½–6 inches (4–15 cm) long, several on slender stalks from dark red buds, showy, about 1 inch (25 mm) across, irregular shaped and delicate. Narrow pale green basal tube (hypanthium) is ⅜ inch (5 mm) long; calyx of four pale yellow sepals ½ inch (13 mm) long; corolla of three pale yellow petals with red veins, keeled and broader toward finely wavy apex, two outer ⅝ inch (15 mm) long, central petal ⅜ inch (10 mm) long, and two others reduced to minute scales; three greenish stamens ½ inch (13 mm) long, united by filaments to middle, and two minute sterile stamens; and green beanlike pistil ⅝ inch (15 mm) long with stalked one-celled ovary and curved style.

Pods oblong, often curved, 1½–4½ inches (4–11 cm) long, ¾–1 inch (2–2.5 cm) wide, and ⅜–⅝ inch (1–1.5 cm) thick, slightly narrowed between seeds, brown, rough, heavy, with brittle outer shell and dark brown fibrous pulp, edible though very sour, not splitting open. Seeds usually 3–4, beanlike, flattened shiny brown, ⅝ inch (15 mm) long.

Sapwood is light yellow and moderately soft, and the small heartwood dark purplish brown. The wood is described as very hard, heavy (sp. gr. 0.9), and takes a fine polish. It is strong and durable, although very susceptible to attack by dry-wood termites. It has been used occasionally in Hawaii for chopping blocks and rated as excellent.

The wood is used in other tropical areas chiefly for fuel and is reported to generate great heat. In other places

where the species is sufficiently common, the wood is employed for construction, tool handles, furniture, and articles in wood turning but is considered very difficult to work. Gunpowder was formerly manufactured from its charcoal.

Elsewhere, this tree is planted around homes for its fruits. A refreshing beverage like lemonade, as well as candy and preserves, are prepared from the edible fruit pulp of the pods. The young tender sour fruits have been cooked for seasoning meats, and the young leaves and flowers are reportedly consumed as food. The ornamental flowers attract bees and are an important source of honey. However, the litter of the pods is objectionable in street planting. In India, the trees are planted on forest firebreaks because the ground underneath usually remains bare of other plants.

The fruit pulp is employed in home medicine and was formerly an official drug source of a laxative. It contains sugar as well as acetic, tartaric, and citric acids, and is antiscorbutic. Medical decoctions have been obtained from flowers, seeds, young leaves, and bark. A yellow dye can be made from the leaves.

In Hawaii, planted mainly for shade and along roadsides in dry areas, it persists and escapes from cultivation. Easily propagated from seed, the tree is not popular now as an ornamental. Introduced in 1797 by Don Marin, it is seen mostly in the older parts of towns where it was planted during the 1800s. Such a tree is growing on Mililani Street, adjacent to the Judiciary Building in Honolulu.

Range

Native of the Old World tropics and widely planted and naturalized in tropical and subtropical regions. It was introduced into the New World at a very early date. Cultivated and often naturalized throughout the West Indies and from Mexico to Brazil. Planted and naturalized in Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands. Introduced also in southern Florida and naturalized locally.

Special areas

Waimea Arboretum, Foster

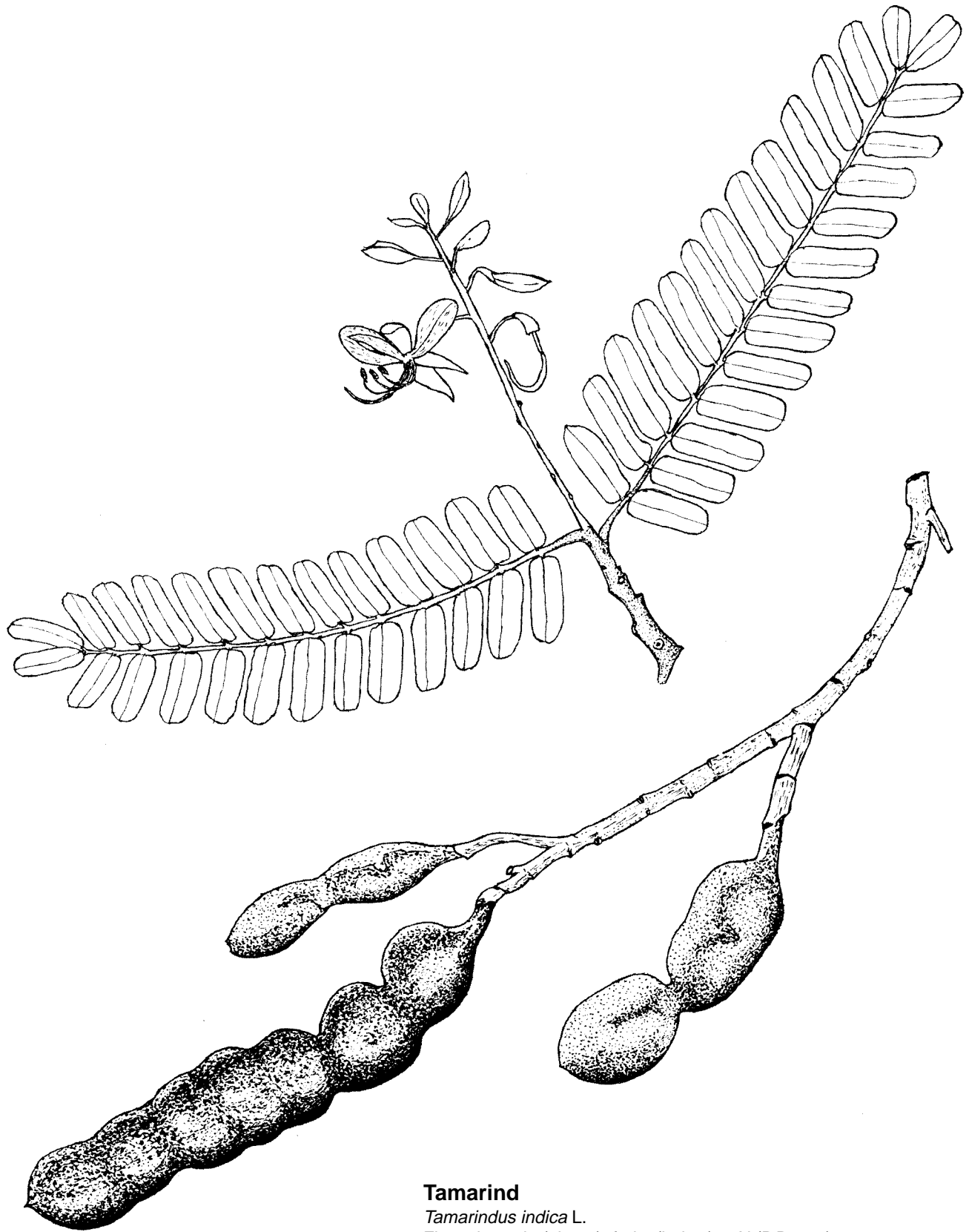
Champion

Height 62 ft (18.9 m), c.b.h. 21.7 ft (6.6 m), spread 47 ft (14.3 m). Pioneer Mill Co., Lahaina, Maui (1968).

Other common names

wi 'awa'awa; tamarindo (Spanish); kamalindo (Guam)

The scientific and common names are from Arabic *tamr hindi*, Indian dried date, through Spanish and Italian *tamarindo*.



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Flowering twig (above), fruits (below), 1 X (P.R. v. 1).