

# *Senna pendula* (Humb. & Bonpl. ex Willd.)

H.S.Irwin & Barneby var. *glabrata* (Vogel) H.S.Irwin & Barneby



**Common Name:** Climbing cassia, Christmas cassia, Christmas senna, cassia shrub

**Synonymy:** *Cassia coluteoides* Coll.; *C. bicapsularis* L. and *C. surattensis* Burm. f. misapplied

**Origin:** South America

**Botanical Description:** Sprawling evergreen shrub to 4 m (13 ft) tall (or wide), with somewhat zigzag, sparsely hairy stems. Leaves alternate, stalked, even-pinnately compound, with 3-6 pairs of leaflets, larger ones at leaf tip; leaflets to 4 cm (1.6 in) long, oblong with rounded tips; petioles with gland above, between lowermost leaflets (and occasionally between others). Flowers yellow or yellow green, 3-4 cm (1.2-1.6 in) across, in 3- to 12-flowered racemes near stem tips; stamens with prominent, curved filaments. Fruit a brown slender pod, cylindrical, glabrous, 7-12 cm (3-5 in) long.

**Ecological Significance:** Briefly noted by Small (1933) as seen in south Florida. Commonly cultivated for ornament in Florida at least since the 1940s (Bailey and Bailey 1947). Described as fast and rank in its growth (Maxwell and Maxwell 1961). Observed in the wild in south Florida since the early 1970s (D. F. Austin, Florida Atlantic University, 1995 pers. comm.). Noted as naturalized in south Florida, and becoming weedy in the Bahamas and disturbed areas in South America (Irwin and Barneby 1982) and as moderately

established outside cultivation in Florida by 1990 (Isely). Displaces native vegetation in disturbed and undisturbed areas of Florida's tropical hammocks, coastal strands, and canal banks (M. Renda, The Nature Conservancy, 1996 pers. comm.). Often becomes established in sunny openings and then clambers over adjacent canopy (Austin 1998a).

**Distribution:** Native to Brazil, Peru, through Bolivia and south to Paraguay and Argentina; naturalized in the Bahamas and Florida, and probably also in southern Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi (Isely 1990). Cultivated in all regions of Florida (Hunt 1977, Nelson 1996). Often sold as *C. bicapsularis* (Isely 1990). In Florida, documented as invading mesic hammocks, hardwood hammocks, basin swamps, and ruderal communities. Documented by herbarium records from peninsular Florida, from Pinellas and Brevard south to Miami-Dade and Collier counties (Wunderlin and Hansen 2004).

**Life History:** Hardy north of the frost line; will come back if tops killed by freezing (Maxwell and Maxwell 1961). Grows easily once established (Nelson 1996). Quite salt tolerant; does well in sandy soil; needs pruning regularly to contain sprawl (Maxwell and Maxwell 1961). Flowers in late fall to early winter, producing numerous seeds in each pod (Isely 1990).