

Plant profile:

Erythrina crista-galli L.

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Family: Leguminosae

Common name: seibo (or sometimes ceibo)



Erythrina crista-galli or seibo is the national flower of Argentina. The specific epithet *crista-galli* is Latin in origin meaning cock's comb and obviously referring to the bright red flowers.

Erythrina L. is a large pantropical genus with about 104 species. The genus generally has red or orange flowers and in fact the most striking thing about the seibo are the large (~4cm long) bright red flowers, perhaps similar at first glance to our native kaka beak (*Clianthus puniceus*).

The legumes of seibo are multiseeded and similar in appearance to the seedpods of our native *Sophora* species though, as the trees were still flowering, I (BJA) only saw pictures of the fruits while I was in Buenos Aires. Seibo is a medium sized tree (4-10m tall), with a trunk which may reach 1m in diameter, and has a rough grey bark.

The leaves are pinnate with 3 large (3-11cm long) glabrous leaflets. The leaflets are elliptical-ovate and entire.

The most amazing thing about the seibo is perhaps that the wood was used in the 1800's and into the early part of last century as paving or cobblestones on the streets of Buenos Aires. Sometimes it is still possible to see the wood on the streets where the asphalt has cracked and broken which is a very common thing in Buenos Aires.

Although the seibo is a common ornamental in the streets and gardens of Buenos Aires this is the southern limit of its distribution, which extends into Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and northern Argentina. The seibo is most common in the Delta between the River Paraná and the River Uruguay, which forms the western and southern border between Uruguay and Argentina.

Reference: Cabrena, A.L. and Zardini, E.M. (1978) *Manuel de la Flora de los Alrededores de Buenos Aires*, 2nd Edition, Editorial Acme S.A.C.I., Buenos Aires