

## Doon Watch Nature Series for Dehradun Live Hindustan Times by Sanjay Sondhi

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### Amaltas-The Golden Shower Tree

Heat waves ripple up Dehradun's tar roads. As the sun beats down, the mercury has climbed to previously unheard of levels. Fortunately, our proximity to the hills has ensured that we haven't yet hit the half century mark, as has Rajasthan. In the midst of a hot summer, pre-monsoon showers bring us some relief. However, if we look around us, nature has provided for a unique type of pre-monsoon shower that provide us with relief of a different kind!

I am talking about the gorgeous golden-yellow flowers of the Golden Shower Tree or the Amaltas (*Cassia fistula*) that is blooming all over the city. Despite the heat, one look at the spectacular inflorescence of bright yellow flowers, hanging in bunches, with the dry, brown hills forming the backdrop, is sufficient to give me a welcome dose of adrenalin, despite the heat. The Amaltas or the Indian Laburnum, as it is also called, lines Dehradun's roads, brightening up our days.

The flowering of the Amaltas is one of the breathtaking sights of the hot summer. When the golden-yellow flowers appear, most of the leaves are shed, leaving the tree with a golden hue, with only a sprinkling of green leaves. Soon, long bean-like black seed pods will appear giving the yellow blossoms a peculiar black streaking. Unlike many other fruiting trees, the seed pods of the Amaltas do not break when the pods fall to the ground. Instead, the tree is dependent on animals such as monkeys who eat the fruit, and disperse its seeds.

As the tree begins to shed its flowers, a yellow carpet will adorn the roads. It is the tree's equivalent of giving humans a yellow "red carpet"; after all, the flowering of the Amaltas is a a special occasion, isn't it!

Beauty apart, the Amaltas has other uses as well. The Common Emigrant butterfly lays its eggs on the Amaltas and its caterpillar gorge on its leaves. Humans, too, watching the caterpillars enjoy themselves, are not to be left behind. The flower buds of the Amaltas are used to make a tasty *pakor*s by many people! The Amaltas is known as a "disease killer". Many parts of the plant, from its roots, to its fruit are used as medicine for stomach ailments and for curing fevers.



Such is the beauty of this flower, that it is the state flower of Kerala as well as Thailand's National Flower. However, for us folks here in Doon, national flower or not, the Amaltas is nature's balm to us in this hot summer season. Enjoy its blooms, while they last.

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Making a difference: Come the rains, and soon it will be tree planting time! This year, plant an Amaltas tree in your garden. They are indigenous, pretty and grow well in hot, sunny areas (which Dehradun is turning into pretty quickly!)