After loitering into the premises of the local nursery, Rupa and Manu were pleasantly surprised and elated when they spotted an abundance of this marvelous breed of medicinal plant known as the Seven Golden Candlesticks. Their usual guide in such tours, Bantu mama informed them about its scientific name as Cassia alata. As the plant produces a lot of nectar, it was attracting many huge red ants that were eager to get a share of food.

"Wow, what an unusual name, and indeed, the flower looks like a Christmas candle", exclaimed Rupa, to which Bantu mama replied that "this attractive shrub is named for its flower buds which grow in a column and look like fat yellow candles each complete with a flame! The leaves fold together at night". Sensing their ever so eager, inquisitive look, Bantu mama proceeded to share his experience with this extraordinary plant.

"I have a strong and long-standing affinity with this plant as far back as in the 1980s. As a child, my skin had been frequently plagued with problematic skin. My feet would break out in blistered-like rashes and itch throughout the day. The skin on my feet did not just break out in sores during childhood but the skin started peeling to the extent that it became scaly", said Bantu mama.

"Several dermatologists were consulted but the condition could not be cured. In fact, the condition was making its way upwards from my foot soles all the way up to my ankles. To sum it up, my feet were not only gruesome looking but it was rotting with a bad stench". "Ewwww", said Rupa and continued listening.

"It was during a fateful trip to one of the dermatologists in a private hospital where my mother (your grandma), chanced upon an old aunty who was also a patient. She told my mom to visit her bungalow as she had a plant that could cure my skin condition. As we were all driven out of desperation, we accepted her invitation and drove up to her place. That was the very first time when I got to know all about this miraculous plant known as the Seven Golden Candlesticks", said Bantu mama with a casual smile on his face.

"The old aunty cut down about 5 stalks of leaves from her plant and rinsed them in water prior to boiling them in a metal pot of water. Once the leaves were boiled and cooked, a kind of "soup" that was a shade of green was ready. The soup was then transferred into an aluminium basin. While the liquid was still hot after boiling, I was asked to dip my feet into the basin, and I assure you that this procedure should be done at every user's discretion. My threshold for heat was and is still pretty high. Needless to say, it still hurts a big deal!"

"However, I must say that the 'soup' of this Seven Golden Candlesticks works best when it is still hot (not lukewarm) because the hot temperature seemed to have a catalytic effect on curing the stubborn skin condition for my feet. When my condition was extremely bad in the beginning, there was a stinging sensation during the feet soak. It hurt so badly that it felt like there were thousands of ants biting into those freakish rashes".

"The colour of the 'soup' gradually changed from a greenish shade to brown! This feet soaking ritual went on every day for a period of 6 months before all the rashes were completely gone. And I continued with the feet soak for another 6 months because all in the family were fearful that the skin condition might just relapse. The results were remarkable because not only did the skin on my feet heal, the skin texture looks good till today", said Bantu mama.

Bantu mama informed them further that the leaves or sap are widely used to treat fungal infections such as ringworm as they contain a fungicide, chrysophanic acid. Because of its anti-fungal properties, it is a common ingredient in soaps, shampoos and lotions nowadays. The effectiveness of this plant against skin diseases is confirmed by modern scientific studies. Rupa suddenly remembered the nappy rash on their infant cousin Aditi’s bum, and made a mental note of giving the useful information to her aunt. Meanwhile, for more information on this amazing plant, turn overleaf......
SEVEN GOLDEN CANDLESTICKS: THE SKIN PROTECTOR

The Best Herbal Fungicide - Cassia alata

Cassia alata or the candle bush is an important medicinal plant, as well as an ornamental flowering plant.

Family: Caesalpinioideae [Gulmohar family]
Botanical name: Cassia alata

What are my Vernacular names?
English: Ringworm shrub, Christmas Candle, Senna, Candletree
Sanskrit: Dadrughna, Dvtpagasti
Hindi: Daudurudan, Daadmari
Malayalam: Aanattakara, Malamatakara, Seema agatti, Puzhukcadittakara

Where can you find me?
Habitat native to the West Indies and Mexico, I am found in wild, almost throughout India.

How do I look like?
I am a shrub standing 3-4 metres tall, with leaves 50-80 cm long. The inflorescence (flowers) looks like a yellow candle. My fruit shaped like a straight pod is up to 25 cm long. My seeds are distributed by water or animals. My leaves close in the dark. The seed pods are nearly straight, dark brown or nearly black, about 15 cm long and 15 mm wide. On both sides of the pods there is a wing that runs the length of the pod. Pods contain 50 to 60 flattened, triangular seeds.
What are my Uses?

- Leaves or sap of this shrub are used to treat fungal infections such as ringworm. They contain chrysophanic acid, a fungicide. Because of its anti-fungal properties, it is a common ingredient in soaps, shampoos and lotions. The effectiveness of this plant against skin diseases is confirmed by modern scientific studies.
- Other chemicals contained in the plant include saponin which acts as a laxative and expels intestinal parasites.
- The boiled leaves are used to treat high-blood pressure.
- Besides skin diseases, it is also used to treat a wide range of ailments from stomach problems, fever, asthma to snake bite and venereal diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhoea.
- This powerful plant is used in the Indian systems of medicine namely Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani. According to Ayurveda, this plant pacifies vitiated Kapha and Pitta. It is used in medicaments against inflammation, ringworm, cough, bronchitis and asthma.
- The leaves are ground in a mortar to obtain a kind of "green cotton wool". This is mixed with the same amount of vegetable oil then rubbed on the affected area (ringworm) 2-3 times a day. A fresh preparation is made every day. It may also help remove toxins from the body (detoxification).
- It is also used against other skin diseases, intestinal worms, poison, constipation, hemorrhoids and alopecia.
- In treatment for ringworm, usually, the leaves are crushed and made into paste and applied on the affected parts.
- For treatment of eczema, the infected part is washed repeatedly with strong decoction of the leaves and flowers.
- In cases of bronchitis and asthma, in herpetic constitutions, decoction of the leaves and flowers is administered repeatedly during the day, relieving dyspnoeal oppression and promoting expectoration. The medicine also acts on the bowels slightly and increases the secretion of urine.
- In snakebite, the fresh leaves are given internally. For scorpion's sting, any part of the plant is made into paste and applied to the sting. However, the leaves are not an antidote to snake-venom and the scorpion sting.
- The leaves are considered most effective against herpes and the wood in decoction is used as a mild purgative.
- The pounded fresh leaves are applied or rubbed on to all kind of skin afflictions. In Phillipines, the leaves are applied to dhobey itch, craw-craw and ringworm on the forehead or on the skin. This is one of the most effective amongst native medicine. Women drink water boiled with the leaves to hasten delivery.
- This plant is used in different ways and for different purposes. The bioactivity of this plant includes antibacterial, antifungal, antimicrobial, diuretic, laxative, analgesic and choleric. Studies for the clinical use of this plant are still under development for its maximum effectiveness.