

### *Acacia catechu*

[Synonyms : *Acacia camplyacantha*, *Acacia polyacantha*, *Catechu nigrum*, *Mimosa catechu*]

**CATECHU** is a deciduous tree. Native to eastern India, to Burma (now referred to as Myanmar), Sri Lanka and tropical east Africa, it has pale yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Acacia à cachou* (French), *Acacia catecu* (Italian), *Acacia catecú* (Spanish), *Akatsiia katexinskaia* (Russian), *Akatsiia katexu* (Russian), *Akazie* (German), *Baga* (Tamil), *Balaputra* (Sanskrit), Black catechu, Black cutch, Cacho, *Cachou* (Dutch), *Cachouboom* (Dutch), *Cachoutier* (French), *Cachu* (Hindi), Catechu tree, *Chandra* (Telugu), Cutch, Cutch tree, Dark catechu, *Er cha* (Chinese, Taiwanese), *Gayatri* (Sanskrit), *Gerberakazie* (German), *Gra thin thaeht* (Thai), *He xian yao* (Taiwanese), *Indischer Gummi* (German), *Kaat* (Farsi), *Kaderi* (Marathi), *Kaggali* (Kannada), *Kagli* (Hindi), *Kalu* (Tamil), *Kamugu* (Tamil), *Kanchu* (Telugu), *Karangalli* (Tamil), *Karimali* (Malayalam), *Karingali* (Malayalam), *Karinnali* (Malayalam), *Karugali* (Tamil), *Karungali* (Tamil), *Karunkali* (Tamil), *Kashukatti* (Tamil), *Kat* (Assamese, English), *Katechu* (German), *Katechuakacia* (Swedish), *Katechu akacie* (Danish), *Katechu-Akazie* (German), *Katechubaum* (German), *Kath* (Kashmiri), *Katha* (Hindi, Urdu), *Katha safaid* (Urdu), *Khadira* (Sanskrit), *Khadirah* (Sanskrit), *Khadiram* (Malayalam), *Khair* (Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu), *Khaira* (Hindi, Marathi, Oriya), *Khair gum*, *Khair tree*, *Kharira* (Assamese), *Khayar* (Hindi), *Khayer* (Bengali), *Kher* (Gujarati), *Khera* (Bengali), *Kutch*, *Kuth* (Bengali), *Mung-ting* (Burmese, Nepalese), *Pathi drum* (Sanskrit), *Peguasenyaku* (Japanese), *Pegu-catechu*, *Pinang* (Malay), *Ratkihiri* (Sinhalese), *Sa jaeh* (Thai), *See siat* (Thai), *See siat gaen* (Thai), *Seesiat nua* (Thai), *See siiat leuuang* (Thai), *See siiat luuang* (Thai), *Seringueira* (Portuguese), *Sha* (Burmese), *Shaji* (Burmese), *Supari chikni* (Urdu), *Tallatuma* (Hindi), *Terra japonica*, *Tun-sa-se* (Burmese), and Wadalee-gum tree.

Heartwood chips are boiled and strained and the resulting liquid is allowed to evaporate to yield a solid glossy, brown extract (familiar to many as Cutch) which has a very astringent then bitter and sweetish taste. The colour varies according to its purity and the palest extract contains the least impurity.

*Catechu* is a local Asian name used for several plants.

The solid extract has been exported from India to China from at least the time of the introduction of sea-borne trade between the two Countries, and also to Arabia and Persia (now Iran). It was not until the 16<sup>th</sup> Century that this commodity (then known as Cacho or Kat) came to the attention of the Portuguese traders. Authorities who state that it reached Europe itself in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century note that Europeans were unaware of its source and thought initially that it was a mineral (which they called *terra japonica*). By the middle of that Century however it had found a place in at least one European pharmacopoeia.

The darker gum resin is used for tanning. It also yields a reddish-brown dye for cloth (it was used for the original khaki cloth familiar in some military clothing in many countries from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century) and for staining wood. The dye is sometimes mixed with henna (*Lawsonia inermis*) in commercial hair colourings. It is also a commercial ingredient in some toiletry preparations.

In India as in other Asian countries, not least China, the purest form of the resin is chewed with

betel (*Piper betle*). Apart from this acacia gum provides an adhesive and it is used by the matchbox industry.

The heavy but hard and durable, reddish wood is employed locally for making posts, boat-building, agricultural equipment and tool handles. It also provides fuel for heating and it is a source of charcoal.

Catechu is believed to have been introduced to Britain in 1790.

Medicinally, catechu is used to stem bleeding and to treat oral disorders, chronic catarh, diarrhoea and dysentery.