

Acacia farnesiana

[Synonyms : *Acacia acicularis*, *Acacia caven*, *Acacia densiflora*, *Acacia edulis*, *Acacia farnesiana* var. *farnesiana*, *Acacia farnesiana* var. *lenticellata*, *Acacia farnesiana* subsp. *minuta*, *Acacia farnesiana* forma *pedunculata*, *Acacia ferox*, *Acacia indica*, *Acacia lenticellata*, *Acacia minuta*, *Acacia minuta* subsp. *densiflora*, *Acacia minuta* subsp. *minuta*, *Acacia pedunculata*, *Acacia smallei*, *Acacia smallii*, *Farnesia odora*, *Farnesiana odora*, *Mimosa acicularis*, *Mimosa farnesiana*, *Mimosa indica*, *Mimosa pedunculata*, *Mimosa suaveolens*, *Pithecellobium acuminatum*, *Pithecellobium minutum*, *Popanax farnesiana*, *Popanax farnesiana*, *Vachellia densiflora*, *Vachellia farnesiana*, *Vachellia farnesiana* var. *minuta*]

SWEET ACACIA is a deciduous spiny shrub or tree. Native to warm America it has mimosa-like balls of tiny, very fragrant, deep golden-yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Acacia Jane* (Creole), *Acacia de farnèse* (French), *Acácia-de-dioscoróides* (Portuguese), *Acacia farnese* (Italian), *Acacia jaune* (French), *Acacia odorant* (French), *Acacia odorante* (French), *A jao chiu* (Thai), *Akácie farnesova* (Czech), *Akacja farnesa* (Polish), *Akasia i farnesios* (Greek), *Akatsiia farneza* (Russian), *Akatsiia farnezskaiia* (Russian), *Akazie* (German), *Antillen-Akazie* (German), *Arimaedah* (Sanskrit), *Arimdamu* (Telugu), *Arimeda* (Sanskrit), *Arimedaka* (Sanskrit), *Aroma* (Spanish, Tagalog), *Aroma amarilla* (Spanish), *Aromo* (Panamanian, Spanish), *Aromo creole* (Cuban, Spanish), *Aromo macho* (Spanish), *Asimeda* (Sanskrit), *Belati babool* (Hindi), *Belati babul* (Hindi), *Belati kikar* (Hindi), *Boo ngaa in doh nee siia* (Thai), *Boo ngaa siiam* (Thai), *Cachito* (Spanish), *Cassie* (English, French), *Cassie flower*, *Cassie odorante* (French), *Cassie oil plant*, *Cassier de farnèse* (French), *Cassier de levant* (French), *Cassiestrauch* (German), *Cassy briar*, *Coastal scrub wattle*, *Daawk khahm dtai* (Thai), *Dei babul* (Hindi), *Deobabul* (Hindi, Marathi), *Desert sweet acacia*, *Divanababul* (Hindi), *Dtohn gra thin* (Thai), *Durgandhakhair* (Hindi), *Ellington curse*, *Espinial* (Spanish), *Espinilha* (Portuguese), *Espinilho* (Brazilian, Portuguese), *Espinillo blanco* (Spanish), *Espino blanco* (El Salvadorean, Spanish), *Espino ruco* (El Salvadorean, Spanish), *Esponjeira* (Brazilian, Portuguese), *Farnesia odorosa* (Italian), *Fragrant acacia*, *Gabur* (Hindi), *Gaggia* (Italian), *Gand babool* (Hindi), *Gand-babul* (Hindi), *Gandha babul* (Hindi), *Gandhelo babul* (Gujarati), *Gandhelokhair* (Gujarati), *Gao greu naawng* (Thai), *Gatzia* (Greek), *Ghand babul* (Hindi), *Godhaskanda* (Sanskrit), *Gonddhoguanria* (Oriya), *Grimeda* (Sanskrit), *Gubabul* (Marathi), *Gu baval* (Gujarati), *Gudoyaboburo* (Oriya), *Guh babool* (Hindi), *Guh babul* (Kannada), *Gukikar* (Hindi, Kannada, Marathi), *Guva babul* (Bengali), *Guya-babla* (Bengali), *Guyababul* (Marathi), *Guya-babula* (Bengali), *Guya-bebula* (Bengali), *Huan lon gyaing* (Burmese), *Huisache* (English, Mexican, Spanish), *Huisache dulce* (Spanish), *Ironwood*, *Jheribaval* (Gujarati), *Jin he huan* (Chinese), *Kadivel* (Tamil), *Kalaskandha* (Sanskrit), *Kamputumma* (Telugu), *Kapur* (Oriya), *Kasthurivel* (Tamil), *Kasturigibbali* (Kannada), *Kasturijali* (Kannada), *Kasturitumma* (Telugu), *Kasturivel* (Tamil), *Katin tēt* (Thai), *Kěmbang japun* (Javanese), *Khahm dtai* (Thai), *Kingoukan* (Japanese), *Knebawal* (Urdu), *Kolu* (Hawaiian), *Krimishatrava* (Sanskrit), *Kusthuri* (Telugu), *Maawn khahm* (Thai), *Marudruma* (Sanskrit), *Mawk-nawn-hkam* (Burmese), *Mealy wattle*, *Mimosa* (Spanish), *Mimosa*

bush, *Muriktumma* (Telugu), *Murki tumma* (Telugu), *Nagatumma* (Telugu), *Nan-lon-kyaing* (Burmese), Needlebush, *Nuga tumma* (Telugu), Opopanax, Opoponax, *Passi babul* (Hindi), Perfume acacia, Perfume wattle, *Piketumma* (Telugu), *Pikkaruvel* (Tamil), *Pissi babul* (Kannada), *Pivel* (Tamil), *Pivelam* (Malayalam), *Piyyatumma* (Telugu), Popinac, Prickly moses, *Rimeda* (Sanskrit), *Roma* (Tagalog), *Saat* (Arabic), *Sannajali* (Kannada), *Santiago* (Visayan), Scented acacia, Scented babul, Scented wattle, *Schwammbaum* (German), *Seenidda* (Sinhalese), Sheep's briar, Sponge tree, *Sunt alanbr.* (Arabic), Sweet wattle, *Tarua kadam* (Assamese), *Vaivai vakavotona* (Fijian), *Vedavali* (Tamil), *Vedda vala* (Tamil), *Vedda vela* (Tamil), *Vedumul* (Tamil), *Vilaiti babul* (Hindi), *Vilayati babul* (Hindi, Kannada, Marathi), *Vilayati kikar* (Hindi, Kannada), *Vild tamarinde* (Danish), *Vita* (Sanskrit), *Vitkhadira* (Sanskrit), *Vonná mimóza* (Czech), West Indian blackthorn, *Westindische Akazie* (German), *Ya zao shu* (Chinese), *Yeribabul* (Marathi).

Its brown fruit pods, that are cylindrical and pointed at both ends, are strangely inflated and will float for days without any injury to the seeds inside.

The flowers are distilled to yield a viscous greenish-yellow essential oil known as Cassie Ancienne or Violet Oil that can impart an intensely violet-like scent. The seeds yield a cooking oil.

The flowers are pollinated by bees and butterflies.

Farnesiana means 'of or from the gardens of the Farnese Palace in Rome'.

It seems that authorities continue to debate the geographical region in which sweet acacia is native. Some note categorically that this is the only known wattle native to both the northern and southern hemispheres. Then there are those who suspect that sweet acacia was introduced to Australia from tropical America – and others who contend that sweet acacia may have been introduced to Australia before the arrival of the Aborigines there and that it is not native to the Americas and was introduced to tropical America by man a very long time ago (whatever that might mean in length of time).

The shrub is believed to have been first cultivated in Rome in 1611 and introduced to Britain in 1656. The Spaniards are said to have taken it with them across the Atlantic at the beginning of the 17th Century and introduced sweet acacia to the Caribbean.

In the south of France, especially around Cannes, this shrub has long been farmed for its flowers and their essential oil used by the French perfumery industry. The perfume was once used to scent hair pomades (particularly in India) and was also dabbed on handkerchiefs. Apart from their importance for the perfume industry, locally the fragrant mimosa-like flowers are often picked to be placed between linen.

Its very hard, red wood has been used for shipbuilding and for making agricultural equipment and furniture – and the bark has been used for tanning and produces a black dye. The brownish fruit pods (and the light brown bark) have also been used to obtain a black dye for leather. In Java broken crockery has been mended with the sticky substance found in the unripe green fruit pods. On the other hand the ripe dark brown fruit pods have been used locally for tanning and in Malaysia, if not elsewhere, they have been used to make a black ink.

Some authorities seem to view the gum which exudes from the stems as poor-quality compared with that from gum arabic (*Acacia senegal*) while others look on it favourably for use in artistic endeavours. Records show that it has been an ingredient in confectionery – and the violet-scented distilled oil from the flowers has been used as a flavouring in food. In India the leaves have provided an alternative to tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*) in chutneys. In some places the ripe seeds have been pressed to obtain a cooking oil. [This same oil has also been used as an ingredient in insecticides and there have been some reports that in Brazil the seeds have been used to kill rabid dogs.]

Although wary of the thorns cattle have been known to eat the leaves. The shrub is also a host for the lac insect.

Sweet acacia has been introduced widely in tropical and semi-tropical regions. It has been cultivated as an ornamental plant or as hedging on continents as far apart as south-eastern Asia and Europe – and has also been grown to prevent erosion. In many places it is now viewed with horror however as an unwanted alien especially where it is prone to form dense thickets for instance in Fiji and on other Pacific Islands, as well as parts of Australia. This contradictory reputation is illustrated most strikingly in Australia where one can find parts of that Continent that celebrate its presence as one of the few woody plants that will flourish in that particular area and contribute significantly to the forage available for sheep and cattle – regardless of its spiny character – while other regions on the same Continent shun the plant.

Some authorities claim that sweet acacia once provided an ingredient for arrow poisons in Côte d'Ivoire (the west African coastal republic more familiar to many as the Ivory Coast).

The flowers have been added to bath water to counter dry skin.

Medicinally, in Java the slime in the immature fruit pods has been applied to sore eyes and a bark decoction has provided an ingredient for a potion given to cause vomiting. The bark has also been used in India to treat coughs, while in the Philippines it has provided a remedy for some female disorders. In Malaysia a medicine prepared from the flowers and leaves has been prescribed after childbirth (although records do not seem to indicate what this would achieve). Records also declare that the bark has been taken internally for treating both diarrhoea and skin problems. It has also been used to treat headaches, fever, dysentery and tuberculosis and has been applied to wounds.