

Acacia farnesiana

[Synonyms : *Acacia acicularis*, *Acacia caven*, *Acacia densiflora*, *Acacia minuta*, *Acacia minuta* subsp. *densiflora*, *Acacia minuta* subsp. *minuta*, *Acacia pedunculata*, *Acacia smallei*, *Acacia smallii*, *Mimosa acicularis*, *Mimosa farnesiana*, *Pithecellobium minutum*, *Poponax farnesiana*, *Vachellia densiflora*, *Vachellia farnesiana*]

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 odorant* (French), *Akazie* (German), *Arimaedah* (Sanskrit), *Aroma* (Spanish), *Aromo* (Panamanian), *Cassie* (English, French), *Cassie flower*, *Cassie oil plant*, *Cassiestrauch* (German), *Cassy briar*, *Coastal scrub wattle*, *Desert sweet acacia*, *Ellington curse*, *Esponjeira* (Portuguese), *Gand-babul* (Hindi), *Guya-babula* (Bengali), *Huisache* (English, Mexican), *Kasturitumma* (Telugu), *Kasturivel* (Tamil), *Katin tēt* (Thai), *Kěmbang japun* (Javanese), *Kolu* (Hawaiian), *Mealy wattle*, *Mimosa bush*, *Needlebush*, *Opopanax*, *Opopanax*, *Perfume acacia*, *Perfume wattle*, *Popinac*, *Prickly moses*, *Saat* (Arabic), *Scented acacia*, *Scented babul*, *Scented wattle*, *Sheep's briar*, *Sponge tree*, *Sweet wattle*, *Vaivai vakavotona* (Fijian), and *West Indian blackthorn*.

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'.

Authorities note that this is the only known wattle native to both the northern and southern hemispheres. It is suspected by some authorities that sweet acacia was introduced to Australia from tropical America – while there are others who believe 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.

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 the plant to the Caribbean.

In the south of France, especially around Cannes, this shrub has long been farmed for its flowers and their essential oil for 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.