

*Adansonia gibbosa*

[Synonyms : *Adansonia gregorii*, *Adansonia rupestris*, *Adansonia stanburyana*, *Baobabus gregorii*, *Capparis gibbosa*]

**GOURD-TREE** is a deciduous tree. Native to northern Australia it has long, white flowers. It is also known as *Adansonie d’Australie* (French), *Australiaanse kremetart* (Afrikaans), Australian baobab, Australian bottle tree, *Australischer Baobab* (German), *Australisk baobab* (Swedish), *Avustralya baobabi* (Turkish), Baobab, *Baobab australiano* (Italian), *Baobab australiski* (Polish), *Baobab d’Australie* (French), *Bao báp Australia* (Vietnamese), Baob tree, Boab, Bottle tree, Gouty stem tree, *Gregori ahvileivapuu* (Estonian), and Prison tree.

*Gibbosa* is derived from Latin *gibbi* (protuberance, humped, hunched) meaning ‘swollen on one side or lop-sidedly’.

The squat trunk and the hollows at the bases of the branches hold water and provide a valuable source of up to 80 gallons per tree for birds, Australian Aborigines, and travellers during the dry Winter season. The tree also exudes a white gum which has been mixed with hot water, or fermented, to provide a drink – apparently the fermented version can be highly intoxicating.

As with the baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) in Africa the bark fibre of the gourd-tree has been used locally to make cordage.

The Aborigines, particularly in Queensland, eat the shoots, roots, fruit, and seeds – raw or roasted. In fact it was a local Aborigine tribe who showed Sir Augustus Charles Gregory (1819-1905) and his party, on one of Gregory’s expeditions exploring Australia, how to prepare the gourd-like, velvety-coated fruit. This provided the explorers with an invaluable source of Vitamin C which countered the effects of scurvy to which they were beginning to succumb. Local tribes are also believed to have made a type of beer from the fermented fruit. Early settlers in Australia also used the ripe and powdering, white pulp as an alternative for baking powder.

Some authorities record that Aborigines have carved the fruit shells into mementos which have been sold to tourists.

Authorities note that the gourd-tree can be transplanted with reasonable success when it has shed its leaves and the flow of sap has slowed. This is understood to explain the lines of them that can be found in some of the western Australian towns.

As with close relatives on other continents, the Australian gourd-trees have attracted their share of traditional stories. One particular tree that was discovered by Gregory is said still to bear a message he carved into it (known to many as the ‘letter in the oven’). Others of repute include at least two trees in north-western Australia which have acquired notoriety as prison trees. One near Wyndham is believed to have served as a prison for rustlers (up to 18 of them), and the other near Derby has not only been displayed to tourists as a ‘prison tree’ (although never used in this way) but has also been the focus for an annual local Boab Festival.