

Anacardium occidentale

[Synonyms : *Acajuba occidentalis*, *Anacardium macrocarpum*, *Anacardium orientale*, *Cassuvium pomiferum*]

CASHEW NUT is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native to tropical America (particularly Brazil) it has small sweet-scented, pale rose or yellow-pink flowers.

It is also known as *Acajiú* (Italian), *Acajou* (French), *Acajou à pommes* (French), *Acajounød* (Danish), *Acajubaum* (German), *Agnikrita* (Sanskrit), *Agrabijamu* (Telugu), *Akajoubaum* (German), *Anacardier* (French), *Anacardio* (Italian), *Anacardo* (Spanish), *Anakardia* (Greek), *Anakardium zaladnyi* (Russian), *Anakarudiumu okushidentare* (Japanese), *Andima* (Tamil), *Andimankottai* (Tamil), *Apple of Acajou*, *Badame pharangi* (Persian), *Balubad* (Tagalog), *Batada* (Sanskrit), *Beli mahagoni* (Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian), *Brazilian cashew*, *Cajou* (French), *Cajú* (Portuguese), *Cajú do campo* (Portuguese), *Cajueiro* (Portuguese), *Cajueiro-do-campo* (Portuguese), *Cajugaha* (Singhalese), *Cashew apple*, *Cashew gum*, *Cashewnoot* (Dutch), *Cashew nut*, *Cashew tree*, *Cashu* (Dutch, Spanish), *Cây diều* (Vietnamese), *Coffin nail*, *Common cashew*, *Đào lộn hột* (Vietnamese), *Derevo kesh'iu* (Russian), *Diều* (Vietnamese), *East Indian almond*, *Eidos fistikiou* (Greek), *Elefantlus* (Swedish), *Epatca* (Slovenian), *Epatka* (Slovenian), *Fistiki kasiou* (Greek), *Gajus* (Malay), *Geru* (Kannada), *Gerumara* (Kannada), *Gidimavridi* (Telugu), *Godambe* (Kannada), *Godambi* (Kannada), *Guchhapuspha* (Sanskrit), *Hajli badam* (Bengali), *Hijli badam* (Bengali, Sanskrit), *Hint fistiği* (Turkish), *Indiiskii orekh* (Russian), *Indijanski kašu-orah* (Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian), *Jambu* (Javanese), *Jambu golok* (Malay), *Jambu mede* (Javanese), *Jambu mède* (Sundanese), *Jambu monyet* (Malay), *Jambu mortyet* (Indonesian), *Janggus* (Malay), *Jeedimamidi* (Telugu), *Jidimamidi* (Telugu), *Kaajuu* (Hindi, Nepalese, Urdu), *Kaju* (Arabic, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Marathi, Punjabi, Sinhalese), *Kajubadam* (Assamese, Hindi), *Kajugola* (Marathi), *Kajus* (Malay), *Kajutaka* (Sanskrit), *Kallarma* (Tamil), *Kaschubaum* (German), *Kaschunuss* (German), *Kaschunussbaum* (German), *Kashukavu* (Malayalam), *Kashumavu* (Malayalam), *Kashuunatto no ki* (Japanese), *Kasiou* (Greek), *Kasjoe* (Dutch), *Kasjoeboom* (Dutch), *Kasoy* (Tagalog), *Kasúi* (Filipino/Tagalog), *Kasumav* (Malayalam), *Kempugeru* (Kannada), *Kerubija* (Kannada), *Kesh'iu* (Russian), *Kešú oříšky* (Czech), *Khajoor* (Hindi), *Kolamavu* (Tamil), *Kola mavu tam* (Tamil), *Kushu* (Sierra Leonean), *Lanka badam* (Oriya), *Ma-muang-himma-phan* (Thai), *Mamuang letlor* (Thai), *Marañon* (Spanish), *Marañón* (Spanish), *Mereke* (Dutch), *Merey* (Spanish, Venezuelan), *Mokkamamidi* (Telugu), *Mundhiri paruppu* (Tamil), *Mundiri* (Tamil), *Mundirimaram* (Tamil), *Munthamamidi* (Telugu), *Munthiriparuppu* (Tamil), *Muntirikkottai* (Tamil), *Munuaispuu* (Finnish), *Nerkowiec* (Polish), *Noix-cajou* (French), *Noix d'acajou* (French), *Noix de cajou* (French), *Orekh Kesh'iu* (Russian), *Parangi mavu* (Malayalam), *Parankimaav* (Malayalam), *Parvati* (Sanskrit), *Pear cashew*, *Pipak* (Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian), *Pipci* (Croatian), *Pomme d'acajou* (French), *Pomme de cajou* (French), *Promotion nut*, *Saram* (Tamil), *Sihosayesi* (Burmese), *Svasy chantii* (Khmer), *Tarukageru* (Kannada), *Thee hot* (Burmese), *Tirigai* (Tamil), *Turakageru* (Kannada), *Venamrah* (Sanskrit), *Viraimuntinkai* (Tamil), *Vrkkabijah* (Sanskrit), *Vrkkaphalah* (Sanskrit), *Westindische Elefantentlaus* (German), *Yao guo* (Chinese), *Yao*

guo li (Chinese), *Yao guo shu* (Chinese), and *Yaruang* (Thai).

The colourless juice (that darkens upon exposure to air) is present in all parts of the tree but in differing degrees of virulence. That between the outside covering of the fruit and its inner shell (surrounding the kernel) is a thick inflammable, caustic oil. The cashew-apple is inedible when unripe, and the cashew nut needs to be processed before it can be eaten.

The cashew apple is harvested when ripe, and the nuts are roasted with their shells still on. Black juice from the grey-brown nut and milky juice from the tree (obtained by incision) yields an indelible marking ink. Milky juice in the flower stems when dried produces a hard black varnish. The trunk gives a gum (known as Cadjii gum) which is similar to gum arabic (*Acacia senegal*). A non-drying lubricant oil is obtained from the nut, and ammonium salts from the resin make a hair dye. The leaves yield an essential oil.

Warning – caustic oil from the fresh shell can cause skin blisters. Fumes from roasting the nuts can also cause blistering and eye irritation. The sap and gum are poisonous.

Occidentale means ‘western (especially North American)’.

The tree was introduced to Malaysia in the 16th Century by the Portuguese.

In the wild the cashew apples (the swollen pear-shaped stalks beneath which the small kidney-shaped fruit are suspended) are particularly attractive to children, birds, flying foxes – and in Singapore monkeys. They are also an ingredient in a traditional Indonesian fruit salad.

The caustic shell oil has been used in India as a white ant repellent for which purpose it is rubbed into house floors and washed over light woodwork – and in some places (as a waterproofing agent and preservative) it has been painted on boats, posts and fishing lines. In Africa it has been used for tattooing. During World War II this oil was (and still is) used in electrical insulation and was an ingredient in heavy-duty brake linings. It has also been added to linoleum and paints. Today still the gum is used commercially in bookbinding and woodworking when it acts as an insect repellent as well as an adhesive. The juice obtained by making incisions in the bark is used in inks generally and offers an indelible black marking ink as well that can be used on materials such as cotton (and can only be removed with alcohol – not water).

In India the bark (in addition to any medicinal application) has been used for tanning.

The wood itself has been used for fencing poles, for building boats, for making packing cases and for firewood.

The old kernels have been used to enhance the flavour of Madeira wine and have been mixed with cocoa (*Theobroma cacao*) to make chocolate. In Malaysia and on the now Indonesian island of Java the young leaves have provided a flavouring for rice (*Oryza*), while in the Philippines they have also been prepared as a vegetable. The cashew apple when soft has been cooked to make jam and sweetmeats, and ground has also been added to soup. In Brazil the juice squeezed from the fermented stalk flesh (the cashew apple) has been made into a drink called *cajuado*, and has also been employed similarly by some African tribes. Vinegar has been made from the fruit juice.

Medicinally, the tree features in local remedies in Africa, and North and South America. The bark has been used in the treatment of various malarial fevers and dysentery. In west Africa the leaves and bark have been employed in infusion to treat sore gums and toothache. While in the Caribbean the leaves have been used in cold remedies and occasionally in treating fever, and the fruit and roasted kernels were eaten by Negro slaves to ease fluid retention. In India the root has been prescribed as a purgative, and the bark has been used to lower blood pressure and to treat leprosy, ulcers and corns. While in Malaysia the bark has been used in remedies for severe diarrhoea.