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Annona purpurea

[Synonyms : *Annona involucrata*, *Annona manirote*, *Annona prestoli*]

SONCOYA (English, Spanish) is a deciduous tree. Native to Mexico and Central America it has large, strongly scented, flowers (with brown-hairy outside and yellowish and purple mottled inside on outer petals, and smaller creamy-white outside and purple inside inner petals).

It is also known as *Annona*, *Anona sincuya* (Guatemalan), *Cabeza de negro* (Mexican), *Castiguire* (Venezuelan), *Gallina gorda* (Colombian), and *Guanabano torete* (Panamanian).

Purpurea is Latin (purple-coloured).

The tree is sometimes cultivated locally and the brownish-grey felted fruit (with their hard, spiny, conical protruberances) sold in markets – although in Guatemala and Costa Rica authorities have noted that the fruit are usually considered to be unwholesome. Apparently they are eaten raw in Colombia and the juice is also squeezed out of the fruit as a drink.

Locally a seed extract has been used to get rid of fleas.

Soncoya used to hold superstitious connotations for some local people. Some Middle American Indian tribes believed that the fruit could cause fever, and Negro slaves put the leaves in their beds to protect them from the spirits of the dead.

Medicinally, locally the juice has been taken to ease fevers and chills in Mexico, and in other countries herbalists have recommended it for treating jaundice. (According to some authorities this latter could be shades of the 16th Century European Doctrine of Signatures according to which a plant's appearance or behaviour suggested its appropriate medicinal merits – an approach arrived at independently in other parts of the world at various periods to this day.) Colombians have also taken the fruit pulp or the juice medicinally. The bark has been used to treat dysentery.