

Antidesma bunius

[Synonyms : *Antidesma bunias*, *Antidesma collettii*, *Antidesma dallachyanum*, *Antidesma thorelianum*, *Stilago bunius*]

BIGNAY is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native to south-eastern Asia (particularly India and Malaysia) and northern Australia, it has many tiny reddish-green flowers.

It is also known as *Airyaporiyan* (Malayalam), *Antidesma* (French), *Ba mao ruesi* (Thai), *Barunai* (Sundanese), *Berunai* (Malay), Bignai (English, Filipino/Tagalog, Spanish), *Boni* (Javanese, Malay, Sulawesi, Sumatran), *Buneh* (Javanese, Malay, Sulawesi, Sumatran), *Buni* (Javanese, Malay, Sulawesi, Sumatran), *Buni no ki* (Japanese), *Candoeira* (Portuguese), *Cerutali* (Malayalam), China laurel, Chinese laurel, *Choi moi* (Vietnamese), Currant tree, Currantwood, *Dokdoko* (Filipino/Tagalog), Herbert River cherry, *Huni* (Javanese, Malay), *Kho lien tu* (Laotian), *Lorbeerblättriger Flachsbaum* (German), *Ma mao luang* (Thai), *Mao chang* (Thai), *Nanyou gomishi* (Japanese), Nigger's cord, *Nolaidali* (Tamil), *Nulittali* (Malayalam), Queensland cherry, *Salamanderbaum* (German), *Salamanderboom* (Dutch), Salamander tree, *Saramando no ki* (Japanese), Wild cherry, *Wooni* (Indonesian), *Wuni* (Javanese, Malay), and *Wu yue cha* (Chinese).

The taste of the shiny red to black fruit is said to be an acquired one – bitter to some and sweet to others. The fruit ripen unevenly in the cluster so that it is a mass of different colours from white through yellowish-green to red or purple-black.

Warning – aside from the fruit, all other parts of the tree are potentially poisonous. Sap can cause dermatitis and the powdered fish smell of the flowers can sometimes be overpowering.

In some parts of the Philippines bignay is considered to be invasive, is a familiar sight in Indonesian villages and is cultivated a little in Malaysia.

The fruit are sold in local markets in Malaysia. They can be eaten raw (apparently they are very acid-tasting) but are generally cooked and used to make jam, and other preserves, as well as brandy or wine. In Malaysia certainly these fruit sometimes form the basis for a fish sauce. The dark red, nearly black, fruit juice is used locally to make deep red jellies. Both the Filipinos and Indonesians eat the leaves raw or cooked with rice (*Oryza*) and add them as a flavouring to other vegetables.

Bignay, in the form of seeds, was introduced to southern Florida in the United States in 1941 and grew successfully into trees. For a time the fruit's juice was popular for making jelly there – but today (although it has been found that the juice produces a desirable syrup and will also ferment successfully for making wine and brandy) it tends to be overlooked in America. (It has also been introduced to Israel in the eastern Mediterranean but authorities note that the climate is unsuitable for fruiting as the flowers do not set.)

Bark fibre has been used for cordage and rope and limited research has been carried out into the possibilities of producing cardboard from the processed wood.

Medicinally, some Asian medicine has used the leaves to treat snake bites.