

Aronia arbutifolia

[Synonyms : *Aronia arbutifolia* var. *brilliantissima*, *Crataegus pyrifolia*, *Heteromeles arbutifolia*, *Mespilus arbutifolia*, *Photinia arbutifolia*, *Photinia pyrifolia*, *Pyrus arbutifolia*, *Sorbus arbutifolia*]

TOYON is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native to California (USA) it has small scented, white flowers.

It is also known as *Amelanchier à fruits rouges* (French), *Aronie à fruits rouges* (French), California holly, Californian maybush, Chokeberry, Christmas berry, *Hong guo xian lei hua qiu* (Chinese), May bush, *Puna-aronia* (Finnish), Red chokeberry, *Röd aronia* (Swedish), Tollon, *Xian lei hua qiu* (Chinese), and *Zwergvogelbeere* (German).

The scent is only pleasant at a distance. The berries are particularly attractive to birds.

Warning – the leaves can be poisonous as under certain conditions they can yield prussic acid.

Arbutifolia is made up of the genus name *Arbutus* and Latin *-folia* (leaved) components meaning ‘with leaves like those of that (wild strawberry tree) genus’.

Local North American Indian tribes such as the Yurok, Diegueño, Cahuilla, Mendocino Indian, some of the Pomo, the Karok, Costanoan and Luiseño have eaten the fruit (raw, dried or roasted), whereas the Mahuna tribe ate the berries to quench their thirst.

Toyon was a source of medicine for some Indian tribes. The Mendocino Indian tribe took a leaf decoction for aches and pains, and the Costanoan Indians prescribed a leaf infusion for some period problems. Diegueño Indians applied a bark and leaf infusion to wounds.

Early European colonists are said to have been reminded of the hollies of much cooler climates by the many toyon groves found in what is now Los Angeles. It is because of this that a northern suburb of that City is said to have been christened Hollywood, now a famous centre for the American film industry. Today toyon still serves as an alternative to holly in local Christmas decorations.