

Byrsonima crassifolia

[Synonyms : *Byrsonima cinerea*, *Byrsonima cotinifolia*, *Byrsonima cubensis*, *Byrsonima ferruginea*, *Byrsonima karwinskiana*, *Byrsonima lanceolata*, *Byrsonima oaxacana*, *Malpighia crassifolia*]

GOLDEN SPOON is a shrub or tree. Native to the Caribbean, Central America and most of South America, it has yellow maturing to dull orange-red flowers.

It is also known as *Changuo* (Mexican), *Chaparro manteca* (Venezuelan), *Chi* (Guatemalan), *Craboo* (Belizean), *Huria* (Guyanese) *Maricao cimaron* (Puerto Rican), *Maricas* (Cuban), *Nance* (English, German), *Nanche* (German), *Nancite* (Salvadoran), *Nancito* (Honduran), *Quinquina des savannes* (Guadeloupe), *Savanna serrette* (Trinidadian), Wild cherry, and *Yoco* (Colombian).

Crassifolia is made up of Latin *crassi-* (thick) and *-folia* (leaved) components.

The aromatic, orange-yellow berry-fruit are eaten raw (in Mexico they are sold in local markets – often bottled in water which preserves them) or preserved or made into soft drinks, wine, beer (widely referred to as *chicha* – which is sometimes frozen on a stick), spirits (rum-like Costa Rican *Crema de nance*) or liqueurs. An edible fat (or butter) can also be extracted from the fruit.

Authorities note that in Costa Rica especially golden spoon is the prime source of nectar for honey bees there for one month of the year.

Both wild animals and livestock enjoy the fruit.

The bark is used for tanning and produces a light yellow leather, and the skin of unripe green fruit has been used on cotton (*Gossypium*) to obtain a light brown dye.

Bark yields a strong fibre.

The wood has been used in Mexico for making charcoal and has also been burnt as fuel.

Apparently it has a pleasant smell when it is burning and is often used in Brazil for that reason when smoking the traditional guarana paste (*Paullinia cupana*). The coarse, reddish-brown wood is used for turning and for making furniture, tool handles and other relatively small items – but records suggest that in many areas it is especially prized for making boat ribs.

Locally fresh pieces of branch are thrown in the water for their sap to stun the fish.

Golden spoon seems to have made few incursions beyond its native habitat. Seeds from trees in Panama were introduced to southern Florida in 1899 and it was also introduced to the Philippines in 1918. Apart from this there has been limited cultivation in Mexico and Central America.

Medicinally, local herbalists use the bark for easing some chest problems, as well as fever and diarrhoea. It is also applied to wounds in Guyana, ulcers in Mexico and snake bites in Belize.