

Caesalpinia bonduc

[Synonyms : *Caesalpinia bonducella*, *Caesalpinia crista*, *Caesalpinia cristata*, *Caesalpinia jayabo*, *Glycyrrhiza aculeata*, *Guilandia crista*, *Guilandina bonducella*, *Guilandina bonduc*, *Guilandina crista*]

NICKER BEAN is an evergreen climbing shrub or vine. Native to tropical America (including Hawaii where it is now rare), it has small fragrant, yellow and red flowers.

It is also known as *Aroi mata hiyang* (Sundanese), Bonduc, Brazil wood, *Bunduk* (Arabic), Cadoc, Cockspur, Fernambuco wood, Fever nut, *Gacha* (Telugu), Gray nickel, Gray nicker, Gray nickernut, Grey nicker, Hold-back, Horse nicker, Indian nut, *Kakalaioa* (Hawaiian), *Kalanji* (Malayalam), *Kalarsikkodi* (Tamil), *Kalumbibit* (Filipino/Tagalog), *Kemrunggi* (Javanese), *Kumburu-wel* (Singhalese), Lady's nut, Nichol seeds, Nickar bean, Nickar nut, Nickernut, Nicker seeds, Nikkar nuts, Pernambuco wood, Physic nut, *Pulikaranja* (Sanskrit), *Punaikkalaichi* (Tamil), *Sawad* (Thai), Sea pearl, Sea pod, Stuco weed, Wait-a-bit vine, Yellow nicker-bean, and Yellow nickers.

The pale yellow heartwood turns deep red upon exposure to air.

Warning – an overdose of the seeds can cause extreme vomiting and purging. The prickles can cause painful physical injury to wildlife.

Bonduc is an Arabic name for hazelnut (*Corylus avellana*) with which the fruit of the nicker bean is compared.

The very hard wood which began to be traded in the 16th Century by the Portuguese came to be known as Fernambuco or Pernambuco wood.

In India fat extracted from the seeds is an ingredient in cosmetics.

The small, shiny yellowish-grey seeds are used as beads and buttons. They are also used by African and Malaysian children for games such as marbles. In Africa the seeds are a soothsayer's tool as well. But it is their appearance in colder climates (and their superstitious associations there) that is perhaps the most fascinating because of the unexpectedness of it. Nicker bean seeds have been carried north on the Atlantic currents to wash up on Scottish shores – and here they used not only to be worn around children's necks as a protection from evil but this protection was also believed to extend to cattle.

Medicinally, in south-eastern Asia the seeds are used to treat stomach ailments. The root, leaves and fruit are employed as a tonic, and to treat dysentery and diarrhoea. In Hawaii the beans were used for easing coughs, and they were also ground as a laxative. Negro slaves in tropical America used the seeds in remedies for some venereal diseases. The plant has also been used in the treatment of rheumatism. The leaves have provided a remedy for toothache and the roasted seeds have offered an ingredient in an anti-diabetic mixture.