

Carissa carandas var. *congesta*

[Synonyms : *Carissa carandas*, *Carissa congesta*]

KARANDA is a spiny, scrambling evergreen shrub or vine. Native to India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Indonesia, it has small (often pink-tinged) highly fragrant white flowers. It is also known as Bengal currants, *Caramba* (Filipino/Tagalog), Carandas, Caraunda, Christ's thorn, *Kalakkay* (Tamil), *Kanachuka* (Sanskrit), *Karakka* (Malayalam), *Karaunda* (Hindi), *Kerenda* (Malay), *Maha-karamba* (Singhalese), *Namdaeng* (Thai), *Perunkila* (Tamil), and *Wakay okachettu* (Telugu).

The plant exudes a milky juice from any part of it that is bruised or wounded.

Congesta means 'crowded together, congested'.

Locally the unripe fruit are used to make pickles. The semi-ripe fruit are made into jams and other preserves. The ripe glossy, white through pinkish-red to deep purple berries fruit are not only eaten raw when sweet enough but are also added to curries and are stewed (heavily sweetened as necessary) or made into other puddings. (In the time of the British raj in India it is said that nostalgic Englishmen often compared them to gooseberries, *Ribes uva-crispa*.) The cooked fruit also yield a bright red juice that can be popular in cold soft drinks.

The berries have been used for tanning and dyeing.

Karanda is cultivated widely in India as both an ornamental plant and as thorny barriers or hedging and in south-eastern Asia it has also offered other advantages locally. A paste of the pounded roots has provided fly repellent and, apart from fuel, the wood has also been used to make small household items such as combs, spoons and various utensils.

The leaves have been fed to a particular species of silkworm.

Some of the tribes of northern India still use powdered root bark for treating worms on animal wounds.

This plant has been grown as an ornamental in conducive climates beyond its native habitat with the added advantage of its fruit.

Medicinally, local herbalists (in India especially) have used the root for treating stomach upsets and worms and have prescribed a leaf decoction to ease fever. Karanda has also provided remedies for rabies, malaria, epilepsy, fluid retention, ear ache, rheumatism, scurvy, convulsions and skin problems.