

Cercis siliquastrum

[Synonyms : *Cercis siliquastrum* var. *alba*]

JUDAS TREE is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native from the western Mediterranean to Bulgaria, it has small and pea-like, strongly scented, rosy-lilac flowers and leaves which turn yellow in Autumn

It is also known as *Arbo Judea* (Esperanto), *Arbre de Judée* (French), *Árvore de Judas* (Portuguese), *Is-sigra Guda* (Maltese), *Judasbaum* (German), *Judášovec strukový* (Slovak), *Judášov strom* (Slovak), *Judasträd* (Swedish), *Judastræ* (Danish), *Juudaksenpuu* (Finnish), *Koutsoukiá* (Greek), *Koutsipiá* (Greek), *Koutsoupiá* (Greek), Love tree, *Olaia* (Portuguese), *Zmarlika Jidášova* (Czech), and *Zmarlika luštinatá* (Czech): and in flower language is said to be a symbol of betrayal, and unbelief.

In cooler climates the flowers often bloom before the leaves appear.

Siliquastrum is derived from Latin *siliqua* (husk, pod, shell) meaning ‘like a siliqua, a fruit pod found in a different family’.

Some authorities point out that the Christian legends associated with this species and many of its relevant names may well be rooted in a misunderstanding surrounding the French name *Arbre de Judée* which actually means Tree of Judaea - not ‘tree of Judas’.

The Greek philosopher, Theophrastus (c.372-c.287 BC), mentions that the very hard, attractively veined wood was used for walking sticks.

Notwithstanding the possible name confusion, the common theme to most of the Christian legends is that Judas Iscariot hanged himself on this tree (there are other species which also claim such a doubtful privilege) in the 1st Century. The variations then emerge. For example some suggest that the originally white flowers blushed pink in shame, while others tell how the flowers which bloom from the wood represent the entrails of the betrayer of Jesus.

Locally the flower buds are often pickled, and both flowerbuds and flowers are sometimes added to salads.