

Chiranthodendron pentadactylon

[Synonyms : *Cheirostemon pentadactylon*, *Cheirostemon platanoides*, *Chiranthodendron platanoides*]

MONKEY HAND TREE is an evergreen tree. Native to Mexico and Guatemala, it has dull red flowers from whose centres extend blood-red stamens forming a hand-like shape. It is also known as Hand-flower tree, Hand plant, Little hand-flower tree, Little tiger's foot, *Mano de mico* (Guatemalan), and Mexican hat plant, and in flower language it is said to be a symbol of warning.

The flowers are pollinated by bats and birds.

Pentadactylon is derived from Greek *penta-* (five) and *dactylo-* (finger) components.

Authorities point out that the weird shape of the flower lends itself to superstition. In the early mid-16th Century when the Spanish were conquering South and Middle American territory their first dramatic encounter with the monkey hand tree is said to have presented them with an unnerving sight – a tree which looked as if it was covered in blood-red hands reaching out towards them. The particular specimen they saw was believed by local Mexican Indians, erroneously, to be the only one in existence. As they were sure it had been created by the gods to bring them good fortune they venerated it. They believed its propagation could give the gods offence so they removed all the flowers (which, of course, prevented pollination) and the blooms were dried and fashioned into lucky amulets. The flowers were also a highly respected ingredient in their treatments for many diseases and ailments, including epilepsy. Later the Europeans came across other trees a – which had not been de-flowered. By 1813 the species was growing on the other side of the Atlantic in Spain and France.

Medicinally, local remedies have used the flowers for treating piles and eye ailments.