

Cinnamomum aromaticum

[Synonyms : *Cassia aromaticum*, *Cassia lignea*, *Cinnamomum cassia*, *Cinnamomum obtusifolium* var. *cassia*, *Cinnamomum tamala*, *Cinnamomum zeylanicum* var. *cassia*, *Laurus cassia*, *Laurus cinnamomum*, *Persea cassia*]

CASSIA (English, Italian) is an evergreen tree. Native to Myanmar (more familiar in the West as Burma) and to southern China, it has small yellowish-green flowers.

It is also known as *Bastaardkaneel* (Dutch), *Bastard cinnamon*, *Bokei* (Japanese), *Canéficier* (French), *Canela-da-china* (Portuguese), *Canela de la China* (Spanish), *Canelero chino* (Spanish), *Cannella della cina* (Italian), *Cannelle bâtarde* (French), *Cannelle de Chine* (French), *Cannelle de Conchinchine* (French), *Cannellier casse* (French), *Cannellier de Chine* (French), *Canton cassia*, *Casia* (Spanish), *Cássia* (Portuguese), *Cássia-aromática* (Portuguese), *Cassia bark tree*, *Cassia China*, *Cassia cinnamon*, *Cassia lignea*, *Chadana* (Sanskrit), *China cinnamon*, *Chinazimt* (German), *Chinese cassia*, *Chinese cinnamon*, *Chinese junk cassia*, *Chinesischer Zimtbaum* (German), *Chinesisches Zimt* (German), *Cinamomo aroma* (Esperanto), *Cinamomo ĉinia* (Esperanto), *Çin tarçini* (Turkish), *Cynamon chiński* (Polish), *Cynamonowiec chiński* (Polish), *Cynamonowiec wonny* (Polish), *Dal chini* (Punjabi), *Dalchini* (Hindi), *Darchini* (Bengali), *Dâr sînî* (Arabic), *Dâr sînî ed dûn* (Arabic), *Dâr sûss* (Arabic), *Fahéjkasszia* (Hungarian), *Falsa cannella* (Italian), *False cinnamon*, *Hiina kaneelipuu* (Estonian), *Hushållskanel* (Swedish), *Kashia* (Japanese), *Kashia keihi* (Japanese), *Kasia* (Greek), *Kasiia* (Bulgarian), *Kassia* (Dutch, Finnish, German, Greek, Hebrew, Norwegian, Swedish), *Kassiakanel* (Danish, Swedish), *Kassiakaneli* (Finnish), *Kassie* (Dutch, German), *Kassienzimmtbaum* (German), *Kasszia* (Hungarian), *Kayu manis china* (Indonesian, Malay), *Kiinankaneli* (Finnish), *Kínai fahéj* (Hungarian), *Kinesisk kanel* (Danish), *Kinesisk kaneltræ* (Danish), *Korichnik aromatnyi* (Russian), *Korichnik kitanskii* (Russian), *Korichnoe derevo* (Russian), *Kuei* (Chinese), *Laurier casse* (French), *Lauro cassia* (Italian), *Pattra* (Sanskrit), *Qassia* (Hebrew), *Qué* (Vietnamese), *Qué don* (Vietnamese), *Qué quăng* (Vietnamese), *Qué thanh* (Vietnamese), *Rou gui* (Chinese), *Sa chwang* (Laotian), *Saigon cinnamon*, *Saliha* (Turkish), *Salíkha* (Arabic), *Skořice čínská* (Czech), *Skořicovník čínský* (Czech), *Sthula tvak* (Sanskrit), *Taj* (Urdu), *Talouskeneli* (Finnish), *Tamaalaka* (Sanskrit), *Tamaala patra* (Sanskrit), *Tonkin nikkei* (Japanese), *Tvakpatrakka* (Sanskrit), *Utka Ta* (Sanskrit), *Valse kaneel* (Dutch), *Yu gui* (Chinese), and *Zimtcassie* (German).

New leaves are initially flame-coloured. The flowers are pollinated by flies and the seed is dispersed by birds that enjoy the fruit. The cinnamon-like taste of the bark and the cooking spice is stronger and less sweet than that of cinnamon (*Cinnamomum verum*).

The bark of 10-year-old trees is collected in the Chinese Spring, then processed and dried for medicinal use (as an alternative to cinnamon, *Cinnamomum verum*). The most pungent bark (with the highest oil content) is cut from trees growing in rocky positions at the highest altitudes (180-300 metres above sea level), or from young shoots when the leaves are still red. Leaves, twigs and bark are used for the extraction of oil by distillation.

Unripe fruits are dried as Chinese cassia buds.

Warning – cassia can cause gastro-intestinal inflammation.

Cassia powder and sticks (in appearance) can sometimes be confused with those of cinnamon (*Cinnamomum verum*). In the United States it is sold commercially as 'cinnamon' (a practice which is forbidden in the United Kingdom). Powdered cassia has a darker reddish-brown colour compared with the tan colour of cinnamon, cassia sticks look like small scrolls rolled up from each end to the centre (compared with the cinnamon quills which look like single tubes). Cassia and cinnamon bark are in actual fact similar in appearance and cinnamon can be adulterated with cassia that is coarser. Confusion between the two in early records lodges a note of caution about its claimed early uses. (Apparently in India any so-called 'bay leaves' are likely to be cassia leaves.)

Aromaticum is derived from Greek *aroma* (spice) meaning 'aromatic, fragrant or scented'.

For the Taoists in China cassia was the food of the immortals that had been prepared by the hare of the moon. The hare had climbed down a cassia tree and, after nibbling at the bark, had prepared the divinely coloured golden elixir of life which had the bright power of *yang*. This was worn in a container to repel disease.

Cassia buds found their way into Javanese wedding ritual. The bride drank a mixture containing a 'lucky' pair of cassia buds – preferably a pair that had grown especially closely together.

In 19th Century Britain, when Queen Victoria (1819-1901) was on the throne, cassia buds were a familiar ingredient in pot-pourris.

German and Italian chocolate makers are said to prefer cassia as an ingredient to cinnamon (*Cinnamomum verum*) because of the stronger taste.

Chinese cassia buds (the dried unripe fruit) have been used as a spice since the Middle Ages in Europe and were probably an ingredient in the spiced wine known as Hippocras.

Today the spice is used commercially by the food industry for flavouring chocolate (*Theobroma cacao*), puddings and spicy sweets, by the drinks and tobacco industries for flavouring, and by the perfumery industry. The oil (known as Cassia oil) is primarily used as fragrance or flavouring for cosmetics, food, toothpastes, soaps, mouthwashes and medicines. Chinese cassia buds are used as a spice in confectionery, and also in pot pourris.

Medicinally, apart from flavouring, herbalists have used cassia to treat diarrhoea, nausea, colds and vomiting. There has been much research into cassia in China, particularly in relation to possible qualities that could make it useful as a radiation protective agent.