

Citrus medica

[Synonyms : *Citrus aurantium* var. *medica*, *Citrus cedra*, *Citrus cedratus*, *Citrus crassa*, *Citrus fragrans*, *Citrus medica* var. *cedrata*, *Citrus medica* var. *limau susu*, *Citrus medica* var. *limon*, *Citrus medica* var. *medica*, *Citrus odorata*, *Citrus tuberosa*]

CITRON is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native to China, Indonesia and India, it has purple buds opening into small fragrant, pinkish flowers (white on the inside) with many stamens.

It is also known as *Ağaç kavunu* (Turkish), *Äkta citron* (Swedish), Assyrian citron, *Bijaura nimbu* (Hindi), *Bijora nimbu* (Hindi), *Bijoru* (Gujarati), *Bimiro* (Nepalese), Buddha's hand, *Bulid* (Filipino/Tagalog), *Campalam* (Tamil), *Campiram* (Tamil), *Cầu duyên* (Vietnamese), *Cederappel* (Dutch), *Cederatboom* (Dutch), *Ceders* (Dutch), *Cedraat* (Dutch), *Cedrat* (Danish), *Cédrat* (French), *Cedrát* (Czech), *Cedratcitron* (Swedish), *Cédratier* (French), *Cedrato* (Esperanto), *Cedrattrae* (Danish), *Cedratzitron* (German), *Cedratzitronenbaum* (German), *Cedrato* (Italian), *Cédro* (Italian), *Cedro frutti* (Italian), *Chí xác* (Vietnamese), *Cidra* (Portuguese, Spanish), *Cidran* (Singhalese), *Cidrao* (Portuguese), *Cidreira* (Portuguese), *Cidrero* (Spanish), *Cidro* (Spanish), *Citronnier des juifs* (French), Citron tree, *Dabbé* (Iranian), *Echte Zitron* (German), *Gou yuan* (Chinese), *Hương duyên* (Vietnamese), *Jambhiir* (Sanskrit), *Jeruk asem* (Malay), *Jeruk kates* (Javanese), *Jeruk sekade* (Malay), *Jeruk sukade* (Indonesian, Malay), Jewish citron, *Kabbad* (Arabic, Syrian), *Karna* (Hindi), *Khatta* (Hindi), *Limau susu* (Malay), *Limone* (German), *Maru busshukan* (Japanese), *Matulunga* (Sanskrit), Median apple, *Medischer Apfel* (German), *Poncil* (Spanish), *Poncilero* (Spanish), *Puurak* (Hindi), *Quả cầu duyên* (Vietnamese), *Quả chỉ xác* (Vietnamese), *Rhobs el arsa* (Arabic, Moroccan), *Shitoron* (Japanese), *Shouk ta kwah* (Burmese), *Sidras* (Visayan), *Sidris* (Visayan), *Sitrun* (Indonesian, Malay), *Sitruunapuu* (Finnish), *Sladkiy limon* (Russian), *Som-mu* (Thai), *Som saa* (Thai), *Sötcitron* (Swedish), *Suckatcitron* (Swedish), *Sukaatti* (Finnish), *Sukaattisitruuna* (Finnish), *Sukaattisitruunapuu* (Finnish), *Sukaattisitruunat* (Finnish), *Sukat* (Danish), *Thanh yên* (Vietnamese), *Tihi tih* (Visayan), *Toranj* (Arabic, Iranian), *Toronji* (Japanese), *Tsedrat* (Russian), *Tsitron* (Russian), *Tuffâhh mâhî* (Arabic), *Turung* (Arabic), *Turunj* (Persian), *Věëx* (Laotian), *Wan fo shou gan* (Chinese), *Xiang yuan* (Chinese), *Zedrate* (German), *Zedratfrucht* (German), *Zedrat-Zitron* (German), *Zedratzitronen* (German), and *Zitronatzitron* (German); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of 'beauty with ill-humour', and mature beauty.

Before the rind is candied, the fruit is kept in brine until the skin is shiny. Essential oil is extracted from leaves, twigs and rind. (The lumpy lemon-shaped, pale yellow fruit have a pronounced knob at one end. There are some varieties of citron that are not too bitter and are edible when eaten raw.)

Medica is derived from Latin *medico* (to medicate, drug) meaning 'medicinal'. (It also happens to be the Latin name for lucerne, *Medicago sativa*.)

Known to the Chinese in 4000 BC the citron is believed to have reached the eastern Mediterranean, where it was familiar to both the ancient Egyptians and the Sumerians by at least 2500 BC. The Sumerians, who dedicated it to Enlil, Lord of the Air (and in due time Earth), cultivated the fruit. Citrons were used to flavour meat, were taken as a breath

purifier, were believed to be able to ‘purify’ the place where a man has met his death, and were thought to be able to preserve clothing. In north-eastern India citrons appear to have been enjoyed for their perfume and to have attracted considerable respect on the one hand as a panacea and on the other as an antidote for virtually any poison – and first references to it there are said to appear in a collection of religious texts known as the *Vajasaneyi Samhita* which date back to a time before 800 BC. [Despite current evidence there seem to be some authorities who think it likely that citron only came overland to Europe from China in about 500 BC.]

The Greek philosopher, Theophrastus (c.327-c.287 BC), describes the plant and writes that during his lifetime the citron was still an exotic fruit in Greece and that its cultivation in Italy, Sicily and Corsica did not begin until the 4th Century BC. Later both Virgil (70-19 BC), the Roman poet, and the Roman natural historian, Pliny the Elder (23-79), mention that in their respective lifetimes the Romans much esteemed the citron for its qualities as an antidote. The ancient cultures also used its essence in incense.

Returning to the middle of the 2nd Century BC however the Jewish culture appeared, temporarily, to have lost its way, and the Maccabees family (later to be known as Makkabi or Maccabaeus) successfully intervened to help in turning its people back to the values they had previously recognized. After the death of his father (the priest Mattathias) in 166 BC and the subsequent murders of two of his brothers, the time had come for Simon Maccabaeus (died 135 BC) to contribute to the family’s efforts. He is credited in 141 BC with re-establishing the nation’s independence from Egypt and then, as king, he chose the citron to grace his coinage. The citron still holds a special place today in the Jewish celebrations of fruit harvest at the festival of Succoth. It also features in some of their superstitions, not least that a pregnant woman will deliver a son if she bites into the citron, and that the fruit represents the forbidden fruit of the Garden of Eden.

Although its origins and arrival in Europe appear to be a matter for debate, it would seem to be agreed generally that the citron was the first member of the citrus family to find its way to the Mediterranean and from there the hinterland of the European Continent. The Romans called it the Assyrian citron or the Median apple and it is understood to have been the only citrus fruit known in Europe for centuries.

At some point it arrived in North America as records show that the Thompson Indians, living in British Columbia, came to enjoy the fruit as a food.

Today citron fruit are obtained almost entirely from Corsica. The fruit are used primarily by the food industry for commercial sauces, pickles and other preserves. The skin is not only used for commercially for preparing candied peel but also as an ingredient in candied fruits, confectionery and syrups. Essential oil is used by the perfumery industry in eau-de-cologne and perfumes. (In the early 20th Century however it was in far greater demand for the perfumery industry that much prized the highly scented oil and it was more widely used then than it is now.) Then the drinks industry uses the limited fruit juice for flavouring as well.

Medicinally, the fresh shoots have been eaten locally in Asia to enhance appetite and treat worms, and the leaves have been used in poultices for easing headaches or painful joints.