

Citrus trifoliata

[Synonyms : *Aegle sepiaria*, *Citrus trifolia*, *Citrus triptera*, *Limonia trifoliata*, *Poncirus trifoliata*, *Pseudaegle sepiaria*, *Pseudaegle trifoliata*]

JAPANESE BITTER ORANGE is a spiny, deciduous shrub or tree. Native to central and northern China it has small fragrant, golden-centred, white flowers and leaves that turn golden in Autumn.

It is also known as Bitter orange, Chinese orange, *Citronečník trojlistý* (Czech), *Citrónovníkovec trojlistý* (Slovak), *Dreiblättrige Bitterorange* (German), Flying dragon, Golden apple, Hardy orange, *Karatachi* (Japanese), Mock orange, *Oranger trifoliolé* (French), *Poncirus* (French), *Sitkeä appelsiini* (Finnish), Trifoliolate orange, Wild orange, and *Zitrusart* (German).

Warning – the thorns can cause painful injury. Large amounts of the raw fruit may cause gastroenteritis, and the fruit can also cause dermatitis.

Trifoliata is made up of Latin *tri-* (three) and *-folia* (leaved) components meaning ‘with three leaves’.

Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1728), who lived on the tiny island of Deshima (in Nagasaki harbour) from 1690-1692 as a doctor to the Dutch East India Company, was the first European to discover Japanese bitter orange.

Native to China it was cultivated in Japanese gardens. It was eventually introduced to Britain in 1850 by Robert Fortune (1813-1880). There and in southern North America it is often grown as hedging not least because of its prominent thorns.

Locally the fruit are used to make marmalades and drinks.

Japanese bitter orange has been crossed with the sweet orange (*Citrus sinensis*) to produce a ‘citange’ and with the sweet orange and the kumquat (*Fortunella margarita*) to produce a ‘citrangequat’.