

*Cola acuminata*

[Synonyms : *Cola nitida*, *Cola pseudoacuminata*, *Cola vera*, *Garcinia cola*, *Kola vera*, *Sterculia acuminata*]

**COLA NUT** is an evergreen tree. Native to the north-western tropical African coast (particularly Sierra Leone) and to the Cameroons, it has small purple spotted, yellow flowers.

It is also known as Abata cola, Bichy tree, *Bise* (Twi), Bissy bissy, Bissy nut, Bitter kola, Caffeine nut, Cola (English, Italian, Spanish), Cola seed, *Colatier* (French), Commercial cola nut, *Gbanja-Kola* (German), Goora nut, Gurru nut, Guru nut, Kola, *Kolabaum* (German), *Kolanuss* (German), Kola nut, Kola seed, *Kolaträd* (Swedish), Kola tree, *Kola zašpičateľá* (Czech), *Koolapuu* (Finnish), *Kolu* (Sierra Leonean), *Noix de cola* (French), *Noix de kola* (French), Ombene, Temperance nut, and True cola nut.

*Acuminata* is derived from Latin *acumen* (sharp point) meaning ‘tapering to a long narrow pointed tip’ with reference to the leaf shape.

First seen in the Congo by Father Carli in 1667, cola (which contains caffeine) was chewed to allay hunger and fatigue, although its ability to deaden appetite would not have been as effective as, say, the coca leaf (*Erythroxylum coca*).

In some parts of west Africa the tree has attracted various taboos. For instance in some places cola nut seeds cannot be planted – although one can transplant naturally-growing seedlings. Then in others pruning the trees is not permitted. In contrast to these there are some African tribes which believe the tree must be encouraged to fruit by beating it (or cutting the bark).

The star-shaped, yellowish-brown fruit pods were also used by some African tribes as a form of currency.

Cola nut was introduced to the Caribbean and the southern states of North America by the African slaves who brought it with them from their homelands.

Fresh cola pod is rarely found outside areas where it grows, especially its native habitat in Africa where pieces of it are eaten before a meal as it is believed to enhance digestion and enhance the flavour of food.

At one time it is believed to have been an ingredient in the drink, Coca-cola.

Today cola nut is a commercial ingredient for the drinks industry that uses the dried nuts in cola-type drinks, as a flavouring for cordials and soft drinks, and in making wine. The food industry uses the dried nuts to flavour ice cream and the pharmaceutical industry uses cola extracts in tonics eg. for depression or tiredness, and as appetite stimulants.

Medicinally, although some can recommend it for treating headaches, it is understood that little relief can be obtained if caffeinated drinks, especially coffee (*Coffea*), are taken regularly.