

Colutea arborescens

[Synonyms : *Colutea brevialata*]

BLADDER-SENNA is a deciduous shrub Native to the Mediterranean it has small pea-shaped, often red-flushed, yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Agriosinamikó* (Greek), *Arbre à vessies* (French), *Baguenaudier* (French), Bladder nut tree, *Blåsärt* (Swedish), *Blasenstrauch* (German), *Europese blazenstruik* (Dutch), *Gewöhnlicher Blasenstrauch* (German), *Gulblommig blåsärt* (Swedish), *Mechúrník stromovitý* (Slovak), *Phouská* (Greek), *Rakkopensas* (Finnish), and *Žanovec měchýřník* (Czech); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of frivolous amusement.

The fruit pods explode loudly when pressed.

Warning – the seeds are poisonous for humans and animals, especially cattle.

Arborescens is derived from Latin *arbor* (tree) meaning ‘tree-like or tending to be woody’.

Some authorities have mused on the explanation for its symbolism of ‘frivolous amusement’. It has been suggested that it might be a reflection of the sight of children dancing on the fruit pods or pressing them individually to expel the air when they are ripe and making them explode.

Authorities suspect that bladder-senna was introduced to the British islands from continental Europe for its medicinal properties certainly before 1568.

Bladder-senna, which has been found around the crater of the Italian volcano Vesuvius, is grown in Britain as an ornamental plant. In the past as already mentioned however its medicinal qualities were of greater interest. The shrub must have looked quite strange if, as described in some records, the seeds were protected from marauding earwigs by trapping these invaders in the bowls of clay tobacco-pipes (or in lobster claws) hung from the branches for that purpose.

Medicinally, its leaves have been used as a purgative (and in the past were held to be good for easing rheumatism) – and they can often be added to senna (*Cassia senna*) as an adulterant.