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*Combretum sundaicum*

**COMBRETUM** is an evergreen twining climbing shrub. It is native to the Malay peninsular and the now Indonesian island of Sumatra.

It is also known as *Gegambir* (Malay), Jungle weed, and Opium antidote.

From the 17<sup>th</sup> Century when the Chinese began to be addicted to opium (*Papaver somniferum*) in large numbers unending effort was made to rid the population of this curse. Thus the excitement that surrounded a so-called ‘cure’ in 1906 was hardly surprising. Claims were made in China that combretum leaves could be helpful in treating opium addiction. The news organs carried varying stories, including one about some Chinese woodcutters working in Malaysia. These woodcutters tried the leaves as an alternative to tea (*Camellia sinensis*) of which they had run short. After trial and uncomfortable error (which caused some bowel disorders) they found the best way to prepare combretum leaves was to roast them before infusion – and after drinking this for a week they alleged that unexpectedly their need for opium had disappeared. A Chinese businessman is also supposed to have cashed in on the stories and established a factory for processing the leaves in Kuala Lumpur. Sadly the ‘cure’ has never been able to receive an official blessing.

Medicinally, in Malaysia the leaves have been applied locally in poultices to treat boils and headaches.