

*Cornus mas*

[Synonyms : *Cornus mascula*, *Macrocarpium mas*]

**CORNELIAN CHERRY** is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to central and southern Europe and to south-western Asia, it has small fragrant, yellow flowers and leaves which turn reddish-purple in Autumn.

It is also known as *Cormier* (French), *Corn* (Rumanian), *Cornejo* (Spanish), *Cornel*, *Corniolo* (Italian), *Cornouille* (French), *Dogwood*, *Drieň obyčajný* (Slovak), *Dřín jarní* (Czech), *Dřín obecný* (Czech), *Edible dogwood*, *European dogwood*, *Gelber Hartriegel* (German), *Herlitz* (German), *Krania* (Greek), *Kornelkirsche* (German), *Körsbärskornell* (Swedish), *Male cornel*, *Punamarjakanukka* (Finnish), *Sanguinhe legitimo* (Portuguese), *Sorbet*, and *Svída dřín* (Czech); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of ‘success crowned you’..

The seeds can provide edible oil in small quantities. The wood is heavier than water.

*Mas* is Latin (male) meaning ‘a robust (not weak) species’.

In one of Odysseus’ adventures it is related how Circe threw cornel cherries to the pigs – an indication of what the ancient Greeks thought of the fruit. Further evidence of their disdain is provided by another legend. This describes how a local festival to Apollo (the *Cornus*), to whom cornelian cherries were dedicated, began as a propitiation to the god after a consecrated thicket of them on Mount Ida had been felled. Yet according to the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Greek physician, Dioscorides the fruit were pickled. This was tried 1600 years later by the English diarist and author, John Evelyn (1620-1706), as an alternative for pickled olives (*Olea europaea*).

Its very hard wood was said to have been used for making the Trojan Horse. The Romans made their lance shafts out of it, and it was also used for wheel spokes and for wedges. More recently this wood has been chosen for making skewers, like the dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*), for handling joints of roast meat.

The red dye for the traditional Turkish fez came from this tree.

In France the cherry-like, glossy red fruit are used to make an alcoholic drink known as *vin de cornouille*, and it is these fruit also that some authorities believe the reddish gemstone, cornelian, was named after.

Authorities believe that cornelian cherry was first introduced to Britain in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century specifically as a fruit tree. Its berries were especially popular there in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century there when they were not only prized medicinally but also used to make pickle, tarts and other puddings. But this enthusiasm slowly waned to be superseded by a fashionable interest in its ornamental value by the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Today the food industry uses the fruit to make preserves – and the wood is used for turning. Medicinally, the flowers have been used in the past to treat diarrhoea, and the fruit was recommended by herbalists in remedies for cholera and bowel disorders.