

*Dipteryx odorata*

[Synonyms : *Coumarouna odora*, *Coumarouna odorata*, *Taralea odorata*]

**TONKA BEAN** is an evergreen tree. Native to tropical America it has pea-like fragrant, violet flowers.

It is also known as *Almendro* (Costa Rican, Panamanian), Angostura beans, *Charapilla* (Peruvian), Coumarou, Cumaru (Brazilian, English, Portuguese), *Cumarut* (Peruvian), *Dipteriko odora* (Esperanto), Dutch tonka, Dutch tonka bean, *Sarrapia* (Colombian, Venezuelan), *Serrappia* (Spanish), Tanka bean, Taquin butter, Tongue bean, Tonka, and Tonquin bean.

The seeds were fermented to extract coumarin which used to be recognized as a vanilla (*Vanilla planifolia*) substitute.

Warning – taken in large amounts, it can cause dizziness, vomiting and other symptoms suggesting poisoning. It must not be taken internally during pregnancy.

*Odorata* is derived from Latin *odor* (scent, smell, odour) meaning ‘scented or fragrant’.

Sachets of the ground beans used to be placed between linen or clothing to impart the scent, and once upon a time the powder was also a flavouring ingredient in snuffs.

A tincture of tonka was once employed by the food industry as a flavouring alternative for vanilla (*Vanilla planifolia*). Recognition of its poisonous properties however curtailed its continued use in this capacity.

The highly durable, tough reddish-brown wood has been viewed as an alternative to Guaiacum (*Guaiacum officinale*) and has provided material for turning, heavy construction work and flooring. It has been made into barge and dock fenders, railway sleepers, equipment for pulp mills, cogs, bearings and tool handles.

The extract is said to be used still commercially in bitters, as well as offering a fixative for perfumes and toilet soaps, and a flavouring for tobacco.

Medicinally, seed extract used to be recommended for treating whooping-cough and diarrhoea.