

Durio zibethinus

DURIAN (English, French, German, Malay) is an evergreen tree. Native to Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines, it has whitish-yellow flowers with many stamens,.

It is also known as Civet fruit, *Duren* (Javanese), *Kadu* (Sundanese), *Membuang-burok* (Malay), *Pokok durian* (Malay), *Rian* (Thai), and *Zibetbaum* (German).

The flowers open mid-afternoon and fall by the following dawn. They are pollinated by a single, dwindling species of bat. The fruit, which are ripe when the skin is dull yellow-green and begins to crack, can weigh from 2-10 lb. . The flesh has to be eaten fresh and ripe (when the fruit drops from the tree).

Warning – the flower juice can severely irritate a child's mouth (creating sores which can become infected and cause scarring for life).

Zibethinus is derived from Italian *zibetto* (civet cat), itself derived from Arabian *zabad* or *zubad*, meaning 'smelling like a civet cat'.

This tree, which can live for 100 years, is widely cultivated in gardens and orchards in south-eastern Asia. Although most unpleasant smelling the fruit are much enjoyed in Asia (particularly raw) where it is regarded by some as an aphrodisiac. After a mouthful of the flesh has been eaten the strong smell is said to be less apparent to the consumer.

The large ripe fruit are eaten with rice, preserved with either salt or sugar (or perhaps a prawn paste). Unripe they are eaten as a cooked vegetable. In Java (now an Indonesian island) the fruit are used with coconut milk to make a fruit jelly. The seeds are boiled or roasted and eaten like nuts.

The lure of the fruit is so great that local people will build temporary shelter in the branches of a fruiting tree (or camp at its feet) to wait for the fruit to ripen so that they can be harvested immediately – before bears, tigers, monkeys, bats, and elephants can beat them to it (let alone other human beings). The latter animals are not alone in their partiality for durian as this is shared with many other predators, including squirrels, civet cats and wild pigs.

Like garlic – or even more so – durian has a persistent odour that no amount of bathing can remove. Apparently the smell is such that those who have sated their delight in the fruit are sometimes refused permission to board ships or planes. Many Asian hotels also refuse to permit their guests to bring the fruit onto the premises.

It is only since about 1975 that the fruit can be found for sale in Europe. But durian does not take kindly to refrigeration.

In parts of Malaysia and Java the fruit walls (reduced to ash) have been used in dyeing.

The heavy wood has been used to make shoes and light furniture.

Medicinally, a decoction of root has been used by Malaysians to treat fever, for which leaves and root have also been used by Indians.