

Eleocharis dulcis

[Synonyms : *Andropogon dulce*, *Andropogon dulcis*, *Carex tuberosa*, *Eleocharis dulcis* var. *tuberosa*, *Eleocharis equisetina*, *Eleocharis indica*, *Eleocharis plantaginea*, *Eleocharis plantaginoides*, *Eleocharis tuberosa*, *Eleocharis tumida*, *Heliocharis tuberosa*, *Scirpus plantagineus*, *Scirpus tuberosus*, *Scirpus tumidus*]

CHINESE WATER CHESTNUT is a perennial sedge. Native to tropical Asia (particularly China, Japan, eastern India and the Philippines), it has creeping reddish-brown roots with small turnip-shaped tubers.

It is also known as *Apúlid* (Filipino/Tagalog), *Babawangan* (Indonesian, Malay), *Bolotnitsa sladkaia* (Russian), *Cabezas de negrito* (Spanish), *Castanheiro de água* (Portuguese), *Châtaigne d'eau* (French), *Châtaigne d'eau vietnamienne* (French), *Chikai* (Indonesian, Malay), *Chinesische Wassernuss* (German), *Dekang* (Malay), *Eléocharide à tubercules comestibles* (French), *El-kustnaa* (Arabic), Ground chestnut, *Haeo* (Thai), Horse's hoof tuber bulrush, *Inu kuro guwai* (Japanese), *Kasuur* (Nepalese), *Kinavandkastanie* (Danish), *Kurokuwai* (Japanese), *Ma tai* (Chinese), *Ma thay* (Vietnamese), *Ma ti* (Chinese), *Nuez china* (Spanish), *Oo kuro guwai* (Japanese), *Peperetan* (Malay), *Shinu kuro guwai* (Japanese), *Singhara* (Hindi), Spike rush, *Tekere* (Malay), *Teki* (Indonesian, Malay), *Tike* (Malay, Timor), *Tikitt* (Malay), *Ubi puron* (Malay), *Wasserkastanie* (German), Water chestnut, and Waternut.

It is possible for the roots of one plant to cover an area of one square metre.

Dulcis is Latin (sweet, pleasant, delightful).

Remains have been found in the Spirit Caves on the Burma (today often referred to as Myanmar) and Thailand borders that have been carbon-dated to 9750 BC and it gives an indication of how long this species may have been cultivated for food in Asia. Records also show that they were eaten by some of the Aboriginal tribes on the Australian Continent.

In China the sedge is cultivated in flooded fields that are drained when the corms are ready for harvesting.

The tubers provide local food and can be eaten boiled (peeled or unpeeled) as a crunchy white vegetable. They are especially familiar in Western minds as a constituent of such Chinese dishes as chop suey and can be added to a wide variety of dishes from soups, stew, curries and stir-fries to salads for which they are sliced raw. A little surprisingly perhaps they are also used to make a drink in Asia – one that is supposed to be particularly refreshing in a hot climate. As an export commodity the tubers are usually traded canned. But the Chinese are not alone in finding a market for these tubers as they are sold from many parts of Asia. The Hill tribes of northern Thailand view the corms as both a local food and a cash crop too. Apart from the potassium dieticians note that they add to diet, Chinese water chestnuts are also said to have the advantage of sweetening the breath.

The sedge provides material (not particularly durable) for matting in Indonesian Sumatra.

Chinese water chestnut is not however the preserve of man. Authorities note that for 6½ million magpie geese in Australia's Northern Territory this sedge is a significant part of their diet.