

### *Entada gigas*

[Synonyms : *Entada giga*, *Entada phaseloides*, *Entada planoseminata*, *Entada pursaetha*, *Entada scandens*, *Entada schefferi*, *Entada umbonata*, *Mimosa gigas*, *Mimosa scandens*]

**SEA BEAN** is a vine. Native to the tropics (particularly African and American) it has tiny, dirty greenish-yellow flowers with long stamens.

It is also known as *Bendoh* (Javanese), *Chariyu* (Sundanese), *Chian* (Hindi), *Chillu* (Tamil), Climbing entada, Elephant climber, Elva climber, Florida bean, *Gilagach* (Bengali), *Gilatige* (Telugu), *Gógo* (Filipino/Tagalog), Gogo-vine, Mackay bean, Mafootoo withe, Matchbox bean, Nicker bean, *Pus-wel* (Singhalese), *Saba* (Thai), St. Thomas's bean, Seaheart, *Sentok* (Malay), and Swordbean.

Warning – bark, stem and seeds are poisonous and can cause vomiting and purging. Plant juice in the eyes can cause inflammation.

*Gigas* is Latin (giant).

The name Matchbox bean arose in Australia when European settlers there were still using wax matches. These were ignited by striking them on a rough surface which the hard and flat, disc-like, glossy brownish-red sea bean seed provided admirably.

The cut stem yields a large amount of drinkable 'fresh' water. This will sprinkle out where the stems are punctured and is an indication of the great pressure required to pump the water the length of the exceedingly long stem.

The seeds have long been found on the shores of north-western Europe (including Britain) but it was a long while before European scientists realized that they had been carried by the Gulf Stream across the Atlantic from the West Indies or north-eastern South America. For many in Britain the seeds, often worn in the form of costume jewellery, were believed to bring good fortune. This superstition applied as much to imported seeds as to those picked up on the seashores, especially those found on the Pembrokeshire coastline in the 1940s – and even today they can be seen in seaside tourist shops.

The polished seeds are used locally to make snuffboxes, charms, bracelets and other ornaments that are sold as souvenirs to tourists. They have also been used in Burma (Myanmar) to burnish pottery.

Although the stems are understood to lose their strength quite quickly, they are tough when fresh and in that condition have been used locally to make fish traps. Sea bean is also a source of fibre that has been used locally for nets, sails and ropes.

Both bark and stems, and the seeds when shaken with water, yield a soap substitute and a disinfectant used locally in south-eastern Asia, especially as a shampoo.

In Africa, where the leaves have been eaten as a vegetable, the roasted seeds have also been consumed, and the latter have occasionally served as a coffee substitute too. Young leaves have also been eaten as a cooked vegetable in parts of Asia, as also the boiled or roasted seeds. In India the latter are usually soaked in water before they are cooked.

The leaves provide food for elephants.

Medicinally, Australian Aborigine women once used the roasted seeds as contraceptives. In India the sap from the wood and bark is applied externally on ulcers and a seed paste is used to treat glandular inflammation. In Java the seeds have been taken in small doses for

treating some abdominal disorders.