

Euphorbia tirucalli

[Synonyms : *Arthrothamnus tirucalli*, *Euphorbia geayi*, *Euphorbia laro*, *Euphorbia media*, *Euphorbia rhipsaloides*, *Euphorbia rhipsaloides*, *Euphorbia scoparia*, *Euphorbia suareziana*, *Euphorbia tirucalli* var. *rhipsaloides*, *Euphorbia viminalis*]

PENCIL TREE is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to South Africa and the tropics, it has pale yellowish-white flower structures.

It is also known as African spurge tree, *Chemudu* (Telugu), *Consuelda* (Spanish), Finger euphorbia, Finger tree, Indian spurge tree, Indian treespurge, *Kariaria* (Kikuyu), *Kayu urip* (Javanese), *Kharasani* (Gujarati), *Konpal* (Hindi), *Lankasij* (Bengali), Malabar tree, Melkbos, Milk bush, Milk-hedge, Naked lady, *Nawa handi* (Singhalese), Pencil bush, Pencil cactus, Pencil plant, Petrol plant, Rubber euphorbia, *Sehund* (Hindi), Spurge tree, *Suérda* (Filipino/Tagalog), *Susuru* (Sundanese), Tirucalli, Tirucalli rubber, *Tirukalli* (Tamil), *Trikantaka* (Sanskrit), *Tulang-tulang* (Malay), and *Vajradruma* (Sanskrit).

Warning – it is potentially poisonous and the latex it contains is an irritant. An overdose can cause vomiting, diarrhoea and death, and if the latex is splashed in the eyes it can cause inflammation and temporary blindness.

Tirucalli is derived from a Malayan name.

In some parts of the world it used to be believed that the tree's 'exhalations' could cause blindness.

In the tropics pencil tree can often be found planted in burial grounds. While in Malaysia it has been cultivated as hedging.

The latex, which can be tapped, is believed to be a promising source of hydrocarbons for fuel. It contains about 20% rubber and an unsuccessful attempt to market this was made from South Africa at the beginning of the 20th Century.

This species is used to make charcoal that in India is used for fireworks.

Pencil tree's leaves and stems have also been used as a mosquito repellent, insecticide and fish poison.

Medicinally, it has been used in Java (now an Indonesian island) as a strong purgative and emetic. In India it has provided a treatment for syphilis, and the milky juice has also been used to treat rheumatism, asthma, coughs, neuralgia, toothache, earache and warts.