

Gliricidia sepium

[Synonyms : *Galedupa pungam*, *Gliricidia lambii*, *Gliricidia maculata*, *Gliricidia maculata* var. *multijuga*, *Gliricidia robinia* var. *sepium*, *Lonchocarpus maculatus*, *Lonchocarpus sepium*, *Millettia luzonensis*, *Robinia hispida*, *Robinia maculata*, *Robinia sepium*, *Robinia variegata*]

MADERA is a deciduous tree. Native to tropical America (particularly Mexico) it has small pea-like, yellow-eyed, lilac-pink flowers.

It is also known as Gliricidia, Gorey cedar, *Kona maram* (Tamil), *Madre* (Telugu), Madre of cacao, *Madura* (Telugu), Madura shade tree, *Mata-ratón* (Venezuelan), Mexican lilac, Mother of cocoa, Nicaragua cocoa shade, Nicaraguan shade tree, Quickstick, Rainfall, and Spotted gliricidia.

Warning – most parts of the tree are poisonous, especially the root, bark, leaves and seeds. It is also poisonous for animals such as horses and dogs (although some such as cattle and goats can eat the leaves).

Sepium is derived from Latin *saepes* (hedge, fence) meaning ‘of or from hedges’.

In Middle America the flowers have been fried and eaten.

The trees themselves are not only grown as shade trees in towns but also on coffee (*Coffea*) and cocoa (*Theobroma cacao*) plantations. In the latter at least they fill a role under the general principals of companion planting as the leaves, when they fall, are dug into the ground around cocoa plants for a green manure to enhance growth. In addition madera can be found growing as living supports for the vines in vanilla (*Vanilla planifolia*) plantations. For bananas (*Musa*) and other crops, the trees are sometimes planted on the field edges as a windbreak.

The flowers yield honey and the leaves are used with caution as fodder for some animals.

The hard and heavy, termite-resistant wood has been employed for general construction work and for making agricultural implements, tool handles and furniture.

Locally, especially in Middle America, the powdered bark (or the seeds) has been mixed with rice (*Oryza*) or maize (*Zea*) and put down as rodent poison particularly for rats or mice.

Madera reached the Philippines in the 18th Century at the hands of the Spaniards who introduced it from Mexico. But authorities believe that the tree was only introduced to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) from the West Indies in about 1900 – and from there reached India within the following 15 years.