

*Hibiscus sabdariffa*

[Synonyms : *Abelmoschus cruentus*, *Furcaria sabdariffa*, *Hibiscus cordofanus*, *Hibiscus cruentus*, *Hibiscus digitatus*, *Hibiscus fraternus*, *Hibiscus gossypifolius*, *Hibiscus palmatilobus*, *Hibiscus sanguineus*, *Sabdariffa rubra*]

**ROSELLE** (English, German) is an annual or perennial. Probably native to tropical Africa, it has large yellow flowers with a red outer covering.

It is also known as African mallow, *Afrikanische Malve* (German), *Afrikanischer Eibisch* (German), *Afrikanischer Hibiscus* (German), *Asam susur* (Malay), *Carcadè* (Italian), *Caruru De Guine* (Brazilian, Portuguese), *Ettagonguru* (Telugu), Florida cranberry, *Gamet walanda* (Sundanese), Guinea sorrel, Hibiscus, Hibiscus tea flower, *Hibiscus-Tee* (German), *Hibiskus szczawiowy* (Polish), Indian sorrel, Jamaican sorrel, Jamaica sorrel, Jamaica tea, Jamaica tea flower, Jelly okra, *Kachieb priew* (Thai), Karkade (Arabic, English, German), *Karkadeh* (French), *Karkade-Tee* (German), *Ketmia szczawiowa* (Polish), *Krachiap* (Thai), *Kra chiap daeng* (Thai), *Lalambari* (Hindi), *Malvatee* (Finnish), *Malventee* (German), *Mei gui qie* (Chinese), *Nubie* (German), *Oseille de Guinée* (French), Pink lemonade flower, *Pulincha-kira* (Tamil), Queensland jelly plant, *Quiabo Da Angola* (Brazilian, Portuguese), *Rama* (German), *Rata-bilinja* (Sinhalese), Red sorrel, Red tea, *Roozera* (Japanese), *Roozeru* (Japanese), *Rosela* (Portuguese), Rosella (English, German, Spanish), *Rosella-tee* (Finnish), *Rosellhibiskus* (Swedish), *Rozerusou* (Japanese), *Rote Malve* (German), Royal roselle, Rozelle, *Shan qie zi* (Chinese), Sour-sour, Sudanese tea, *Teehibiskus* (Finnish), *Thé rose d’Abyssinie* (French), and *Vinagreira* (Japanese).

Red and white varieties also exist, and authorities consider the African varieties to be the best. Strong fibre can be extracted from the bark and stems. An oil can be obtained from the seeds. *Sabdariffa* is derived from a local Caribbean name for roselle *Hibiscus sabdariffa*.

After the plant’s introduction to Jamaica in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century it was found, by at least 1774, that it could provide an acid flavouring for food. This was obtained from the dried fruit casing (the little ‘cup’ formed where the fruit meets the stalk). [To botanists this casing is the ‘calyx’ which on a ripe garden strawberry *Fragaria x ananassa* or tomato *Solanum lycopersicum* is small, leaf-like and green but on roselle is large, fleshy and red.] Today these calyces can be found for sale in local Caribbean markets both fresh and dried. Apart from being used in making jams, preserves, sauces, omelettes and cakes, they also offer a red food colouring. In the Caribbean particularly a pleasant-tasting, red cordial known as ‘sorrel’ is also made and is often slightly fermented (the latter especially for Christmas celebrations). It is understood to be very popular on the other side of the Atlantic with the Swiss for whom it is a special ingredient called *karkade* and this has been added to wines and sauces.

The seeds have been eaten in some parts of Africa. Locally there the ‘fruit’ (or calyces) are used for making pickles and for flavouring – and they are also used to make bright red jellies (that for some are considered to rival the delicacy of taste of red currant *Ribes rubrum* jelly). The leaves – and the stalks – are sometimes included in curried vegetables for flavouring (particularly in India and Sri Lanka) and young leaves and shoots have also been cooked as an alternative to spinach *Spinacia oleracea*.

The fresh seeds, or the seedcake after oil extraction, has been fed to cattle.

Today the stem fibre, known as 'rosella hemp', is used commercially. The food industry uses the calyces as an edible colouring and they also provide a colouring agent for the cosmetics industry.

Medicinally, the flowers have been used to treat period problems, and the dried fruit casings are used still in the treatment of coughs and fluid retention, as well as being employed in wound dressings in Africa and Asia.