

Illicium anisatum

[Synonyms : *Cymbostemon parviflorus*, *Illicium religiosum*]

JAPANESE STAR ANISE is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native to Korea and Japan it has small scented, pale greenish-yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Anasphal* (Hindi), *Anis-da-China* (Portuguese), Aniseed tree, Chinese anisatum, Chinese anise, *Dai ui kio* (Japanese), Japanese anise tree, *Japanischer Sternanis* (German), *Mang tsao* (Chinese), *Shikimi* (Japanese), and Star anise.

The whole plant is fragrant with a cardamom, not aniseed, scent.

Warning – the leaves and the fruit are poisonous. (A drink made from an infusion of the seeds, used in error, has caused death.)

The scentless seeds of Japanese star anise have been confused, in appearance with those of fragrant (*Pimpinella anisum*) aniseed.

Japanese star anise is sometimes used in the East to adulterate star anise (*Illicium verum*).

Anisatum is derived from the species name *anisum* meaning ‘like anise (*Pimpinella anisum*)’.

Japanese star anise is known in China as the ‘mad herb’.

It is revered by the Japanese who use it at funerals, decorate Buddhist graves with its branches, and burn the bark both in incense in Buddhist temples and as a perfumed smoke in their homes. Apparently the Japanese have also taken it to achieve relative insensibility before committing hara-kiri.

The seeds are used to kill fish. Today in the Far East it is also used as an agricultural pesticide.

They also yield an oil that has been used for lighting.

Medicinally, the plant is used in local folk medicine as a treatment for toothache and dermatitis.