

Mallotus philippensis

[Synonyms : *Rottlera tinctoria*]

KAMALA (Bengali, English and Hindi) is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native from north-western Himalayas to Australia it has yellowish flowers.

It is also known as *Banató* (Filipino/Tagalog), *Gangai* (Assamese), *Hamparila* (Singhalese), *Kamalagundi* (Oriya), Kamala tree, Kamcela, Kameela, *Kamela* (Hindi), *Kapasan* (Javanese), *Kapila* (Gujarati, Malay and Tamil), *Kesalai* (Kannada), *Ki mejong* (Sundanese), Monkey face tree, *Puddum* (Assamese), *Rambai kucing* (Malay), *Rechanaka* (Sanskrit), *Sad* (Thai), *Shendri* (Marathi), *Senduri* (Sanskrit), *Sinduri* (Telugu), Spoonwood, and *Tavitu* (Malayalam).

Red powder (which rubs off easily from the outer surface of the dried fruit) has not only antioxidant properties but will also float on water.

Oil is extracted from the seeds.

Warning – it can cause nausea, purging and severe spasmodic intestinal pain. In Britain it is only obtainable from a registered pharmacist.

Philippensis means ‘of or from the Philippines’.

The red powder has been used to colour food and drink. Its antioxidant properties are harnessed for making vegetable oils and ghee. The powder is also used by the Hindus to dye silk a durable, rich golden red – and the root also yields a red dye, which has been used for various textiles.

Bark has been used for tanning.

Filipino fishermen are said to have put branches of kamala to a most unusual use. Apparently they were planted in the water as an attractive hideaway for prawns – and at the appropriate time the fishermen would shake the branches and net the fish as they fled.

The grey wood has been used to make tool handles, matches and fuel.

Seed oil is an ingredient in rapid-drying paints and varnishes.

The cake remaining after the seed oil has been extracted has not only been used as a fertiliser but has also been used to make insulating material.

Medicinally, the powder from the dried fruit is used in the treatment of tapeworm, particularly in India, and has also been a remedy for ringworm, and scabies. The pounded fruit have been applied to wounds.