Manilkara zapota

[Synonyms : *Achradelpha mammosa*, *Achras breviloba*, *Achras calderonii*, *Achras conzattii*, *Achras coriacea*, *Achras cosaguico*, *Achras dactylina*, *Achras gaumeri*, *Achras latiloba*, *Achras lobulata*, *Achras lucuma*, *Achras mammosa*, *Achras meridionalis*, *Achras occidentalis*, *Achras paludosa*, *Achras petenensis*, *Achras rojasii*, *Achras sapatilla*, *Achras sapota*, *Achras sapota* forma *asperma*, *Achras sapota* var. *candollei*, *Achras sapota* var. *globosa*, *Achras sapota* var. *lobata*, *Achras sapota* var. *ovalis*, *Achras sapota* var. *pedicellaris*, *Achras sapota* var. *sphaerica*, *Achras striata*, *Achras tabogaensis*, *Achras tainteriana*, *Achras tchicomame*, *Achras verrucosa*, *Achras zapota*, *Achras zapota* var. *major*, *Achras zapota* var. *zapotilla*, *Achras zapotilla*, *Calocarpum mammosum*, *Calospermum mammosum*, *Gambeya mammosa*, *Lucuma mammosa*, *Lucuma zapota*, *Lucuma zapota* var. *anguai*, *Manilkara achras*, *Manilkara breviloba*, *Manilkara calderonii*, *Manilkara conzattii*, *Manilkara gaumeri*, *Manilkara grisebachii*, *Manilkara meridionalis*, *Manilkara meridionalis* var. *caribbensis*, *Manilkara rojasii*, *Manilkara striata*, *Manilkara tabogaensis*, *Manilkara zapotilla*, *Manilkariopsis lobulata*, *Manilkariopsis meridionalis*, *Manilkariopsis petenensis*, *Manilkariopsis rojasii*, *Manilkariopsis striata*, *Manilkariopsis tabogaensis*, *Mimusops grisebachii*, *Nispero achras*, *Pouteria mammosa*, *Sapota achras*, *Sapota achras* var. *lobata*, *Sapota achras* var. *sphaerica*, *Sapota mammosa*, *Sapota zapotilla*, *Vitellaria mammosa*, *Zapotilla achras*]

SAPODILLA (English, German) is an evergreen tree. Native to southern Mexico, to Guatemala and Honduras, it has small fragrant, white or pale green flowers.

It is also known as Beef apple, *Breiapfel* (German), *Breiapfelbaum* (German), Bully-tree, Chicle, Chico (English, Tagalog), Chico sapote, *Chicozapote* (Spanish), Chikku, *Chiku* (Gujarati, Malay), *Ciku* (Malay), Dilly, *Gudalu* (Nepalese), *Hồng xiêm* (Vietnamese), *Hồng xuan dinh* (Vietnamese), *Kaugummibaum* (German), *Kkom na mu* (Korean), *Lamud* (Laotian), *La-mut-farang* (Thai), *Lomut* (Khmer), Marmalade plum, *Mispu* (Dutch), Naseberry, *Nèfle d'Amérique* (French), *Nispero* (Spanish), *Rata-mi* (Singhalese), *Ren xin guo* (Chinese), *Saapotaa* (Nepalese), *Sabojira* (Japanese), Sapodilla plum, *Sapojira* (Japanese), *Sapota* (Bengali, Hindi), *Sapote* (French, German, Latin American), *Sapotier* (French), *Sapotillbaum* (German), *Sapotille* (French, German), *Sapotillier* (French), *Sapoto* (Esperanto), *Sawo londo* (Indonesian, Malay), *Sawo manila* (Indonesian, Malay), *Shimai-eluppai* (Tamil), Tree potato, *Xabôchê* (Vietnamese), *Yan sum gwoh* (Chinese), *Zapote* (Spanish), and *Zapotillo* (Spanish).

The flowers, which do not open fully during the day, are especially fragrant at night.

The trunk is tapped for the milky latex (known as Chicle or gum) from the inner bark. The bark also yields a drug, Sapotine, which is used medicinally.

Warning – large doses of the bark and seeds are poisonous and can cause gastroentiritis. If the wood is worked, its sawdust can be an irritant.

Zapota is an alternative spelling for *sapota* which is derived from *tzapotl* an Aztec name used for several species that have sweet-tasting, rounded fruit with large seeds.

The milky latex, unprocessed and unsweetened, was being chewed by the Mayan peoples of Guatemala, as well as the Aztecs in Mexico, long before the Spanish explorers invaded

the area. [The Mayan civilization was established as a political group as early as 2000 BC and reached its height from about 250-900 AD.] Today wild trees in the tropical rainforests are still tapped for it by the chicleros.

The transformation of chicle into today's chewing gum occurred by accident. Antonio López de Santa Anna (1797-1876) who became president of Mexico in 1833, eventually found himself exiled in New York in the 1840s. Like other Mexicans he was used to chewing pieces of chicle and brought 250 lb of it with him to the United States where he thought that he would be able to sell it as an alternative to rubber *Hevea brasiliensis*. His American partner who was a photographer, Thomas Adams, was given the responsibility of selling it in this context but failed – and when Santa Anna was recalled from exile to resume his presidency in 1846 Adams was left with the chicle stock. He then saw a little girl chewing paraffin wax in a pharmacist's shop and this sight recalled his old partner's habit with the chicle. For the price of 1 cent for a piece of the gum the size of a little finger, he marketed this new 'chewing gum' successfully. With an investment of $55 in stock he set up manufacturing the gum with his son Horatio and in 1871 it was patented. By the early 1900s it had replaced the traditional spruce and cherry gums. He and his competitors added glucose, mint (*Mentha*) and other flavourings – and the United States had managed to corner most of world demand for this new chewing gum as it ousted local alternatives. The latex from this species is now supplemented by that from others (as well as from synthetic alternatives) in order to meet today's world demands.

The latex has also been used in dentistry and in dyeing sails.

The Mayan peoples used the very hard glossy, red wood for building (archaeologists have found lintels made from it in Mayan remains of about 470) and today it is still used locally for flooring, as well as for making railway sleepers and tool handles.

Archaeological finds in some of the Andean valleys in Peru have included a necklace made from the hard glossy blackish-brown seeds.

Mature bark has been used locally for tanning.

In Asia however the sweet fruit are of prime importance and from the tree's introduction they were incorporated in the diet of many tropical nations. Although in their homeland and elsewhere they are eaten raw, particularly when overripe, in the Caribbean the fruit are also popular when made into a syrup.

Medicinally, the bark has been used locally in parts of Asia to counter severe diarrhoea and to treat fever, the seeds have been used as a remedy for fluid retention, and in Java (now an Indonesian island) the flowers have been used as an ingredient in a powder rubbed over a woman's body after childbirth.