

Melia azedarach

[Synonyms : *Melia azedarach* var. *japonica*, *Melia azedarach* var. *subtripinnata*, *Melia azedarach* var. *umbraculifera*, *Melia dubia*, *Melia japonica*, *Melia japonica* var. *semperflorens*, *Melia sempervirens*]

PERSIAN LILAC is a deciduous shrub or tree (evergreen in very hot climates). Native to south-western Asia (particularly from Asia Minor to Iran) and to northern Australia, it has small and slightly fragrant, purple or lilac flowers with deeper purple centres.

It is also known as African lilac tree, *Alelí* (Dutch), *Amargoseira* (Portuguese), *Arbol del paraiso* (Canary Island), *Arbor sancta*, *Arbre à chapelets* (French), Australian white cedar, Azedarach (English, French), *Bakain* (Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu), *Bakami limdi* (Gujarati), *Bakarjam* (Bengali), Bastard cedar, Bead tree, *Bois rouge* (New Caledonian), Ceylon mahogany, China berry, Chinaberry tree, China tree, Chinese umbrella tree, *Cinamomo* (Spanish), *Dake* (Hindi), *Drek* (Hindi), False sycamore, *Faux-Sycomore* (French), *Gringging* (Javanese), Indian bead tree, Indian lilac, *Indischer Zedarach* (German), *Inia* (Hawaiian), Japanese bead tree, *Kintana* (Filipino/Tagalog), *Lien* (Thai), *Lilaila* (Spanish), *Lilas des Indes* (French), *Lilas du pays* (Creole), *Lunu-midella* (Sinhalese), *Mahanim* (Bengali), *Mahanimba* (Sanskrit), *Makazhide sabe* (Omaha and Ponca North American Indian), *Malai-vempu* (Tamil), *Malaveppu* (Malayalam), *Mallay vembu* (Tamil), *Margousier* (French), *Mélia* (Portuguese), *Melie šeríková* (Czech), *Mindi kecil* (Malay), *Mukau* (Kikuyu), *Paradiesbaum* (German), Paradise tree, *Paternosterbaum* (German), *Paternosterträd* (Swedish), *Paternostertræ* (Danish), *Pejri* (Marathi), *Persischer Flieder* (German), *Persisk Syren* (Swedish), Poison-berry tree, Pride of China, Pride of India, Pride of Persia, *Puvempu* (Tamil), *Sibahbah* (Arabic), *Sigra tat-tosku* (Maltese), Syrian bead tree, *Syringa*, *Tamaga* (Burmese), *Tarka vepa* (Telugu), Texas umbrella tree, Umbrella tree, *Vettiveppa* (Telugu), West Indian lilac, White cedar, Wild lilac, *Xoan ta* (Vietnamese), *Zederach hladký* (Czech), *Zedrachbaum* (German), and *Zinzilakh* (Arabic).

The flowers' slight fragrance is particularly noticeable at night.

Warning – an extremely poisonous plant (in varying degree from place to place) particularly the fruit, bark, stems and root bark, which can cause breathing difficulties, abdominal pain, diarrhoea or constipation, dilated pupils, weakened heart activity, paralysis, nervous depression or excitement and death within hours – or days. It is also poisonous for most birds and some animals such as pigs, sheep, poultry and some cattle.

Persian lilac has a similar appearance to pride of China (*Azadirachta indica*).

Azedarach is derived from one of the local Persian names *Azad-Darakth* for this tree.

Persian lilac, which can be drought resistant, has long been cultivated both for its shade and for its beauty. In the former capacity it was a familiar sight on coffee plantations (*Coffea*) in Malaysia. One other use mentioned by authorities is in the realms of companion planting. It is alleged that peach trees (*Prunus persica*) growing within the shade of persian lilac seem to be protected from aphids.

The tree has attracted attention in a religious context in different ways. In India the flowers are given in thank-offerings, and one or two of its names reflect the use of the seeds as rosary beads.

The lightweight, soft wood (which in the past has been sold as cedar wood, *Cedrus*) has been used to make musical instruments and for turning and veneering, and making furniture. It has also provided fuel. Nowadays this brownish-red wood is used for internal construction and cabinet-making.

Sap collected from incisions in the trunk is used in India to make a refreshing drink. The leaves are sometimes cooked and eaten with other vegetables.

Persian lilac's leaves gained a reputation for repelling mosquitoes and today the plant is attracting interest as the source of a derivative for insecticides. The dried leaves were also placed between books and clothing as an insect deterrent. They have been used as a fish poison too. Today the fruit are a commercial source of insecticide, and flea powder.

In North America it came to be known to some of the Indian tribes. Both the Omaha and Ponca Indians seemed to ascribe supernatural qualities to the fruit which they used as beads that were said to bring good luck to the wearer. The Cherokee Indians were more pragmatic as they scattered the crushed leaves in their homes as an insect repellent, and they prescribed a root and bark infusion for treating worms.

Medicinally, the leaf juice was used by both the Arabs and the Persians to treat period problems, fluid retention and worms. More recently the leaves and the flowers are used in poultices applied to ease headaches, the fruit (and the leaves and bark) are used in remedies for leprosy and tuberculosis, the seeds are employed in the treatment of rheumatism and the root can also provide a remedy for worms.