

Millettia pinnata

[Synonyms : *Caju pinnatum*, *Cytisus pinnatus*, *Dalbergia arborea*, *Derris indica*, *Galedupa indica*, *Galedupa pinnata*, *Pongamia glabra*, *Pongamia mitis*, *Pongamia pinnata*, *Robinia mitis*]

POONA OIL TREE is a semi-evergreen tree. Native to Indomalaysia it has small pea-like, fragrant pink-mauve or cream flowers.

It is also known as *Balok-balok* (Filipino/Tagalog), *Bangkong* (Javanese), *Bangkongan* (Javanese), *Dahur karanja* (Bengali), Indian beech, *Karanj* (Gujarati and Punjabi), *Karanja* (Bengali, Hindi and Marathi), Karum oil tree, Karum tree, *Kepik* (Javanese), *Ki pahang* (Sundanese), *Ki pahang laut* (Sundanese), *Kranuga* (Telugu), Kurum oil tree, *Magul-karanda* (Sanskrit and Singhalese), *Malapari* (Malaysian), *Mempari* (Malaysian), *Pari-pari* (Malaysian), *Pawda paki* (Thai), Pongam (English and Tamil), Pongam nut tree, Pongam tree, Poonga oil tree, *Pungu* (Tamil and Telugu), *Punku* (Tamil), *Punnu* (Malayalam), *Ra yot* (Thai), Tallow tree, and *Unne* (Malayalam).

The edible flowers often yellow with age.

Warning – the seed oil and residues after oil extraction are poisonous (more so for cold-blooded than warm-blooded animals).

The inedible, thick and bitter-tasting, yellow or reddish-brown seed oil is known as Hongay oil or Pongam oil.

The tree has become invasive in some of the Pacific Islands.

Pinnata is a botanical reference to the leaf-shape meaning ‘a feathery arrangement of leaflets on each side of the common stalk’.

The leaves have provided cattle food during droughts not least in India and Australia. In India too branches have been lopped for green manure particularly on rice (*Oryza*) fields.

Records show that in parts of India and Polynesia the tree with its fragrant wisteria-like flowers (*Wisteria sinensis*) has been cultivated as an ornamental in gardens and as a street tree – and those flowers not picked for other purposes have provided a useful compost when well-decomposed. The tree (which is a host for lac insects) has also been grown in pastures for its shade and records indicate that it has been planted as a windbreak on tea (*Camellia sinensis*) plantations. Its spreading roots also have the advantage of countering soil erosion and stabilizing dunes.

The dried leaves appear to have insecticidal properties which have been harnessed locally as they are put in among stored grains as an insect repellent.

Bark fibre has provided material for rope and string in the Philippines.

Indian and Australian fishermen have used the seeds (or roasted roots) to stun fish. The thick inedible reddish-brown seed oil has been used to tan leather and in the manufacture of soap and candles. It has also been used in India and the Philippines for lighting and lubrication, and as an insecticide too. Some authorities note that the seed cake left after the oil has been extracted has been fed to chickens – despite its poisonous potential.

The hard, pale yellow to white wood has been used for wheels and posts (and in India particularly for rafters and oil mills). Its beautiful grain has recommended it to cabinetmakers – and it has also been gathered for fuel. (The wood ash has been used in dyeing.)

Authorities on south-eastern Asia contend that the tree's medicinal qualities are of paramount importance in that region, followed by its assets as a shade and timber tree, and source of vegetable oil, fibre, animal feed, tannin, insecticide and green manure.

Medicinally, local Asian herbalists have used the seeds or seed oil (alone or with other ingredients) as a liniment for treating burns and various skin diseases, as well as for easing rheumatic pain. Wounds and ulcers have been treated with the fruit or leaves as well. Powdered seeds have offered treatments for bronchitis, whooping cough and fever. Leaf juice has offered a remedy for colds, coughs, diarrhoea, wind and some venereal disease, and it has also been used in the treatment of leprosy. The flowers have been an ingredient in the treatment of diabetes. Juice from the unpleasant-smelling roots has not only been applied to sores and ulcers but has also been used for cleaning teeth (for which purpose chewing twigs seems also to have been recommended) and to strengthen gums. The bark has offered a cure for beriberi and fresh bark has been used to treat piles. Black gum from the bark has been applied to wounds received from poisonous fish.