

*Morinda citrifolia*

[Synonyms : *Morinda quadrangularis*, *Morinda tinctoria*]

**INDIAN MULBERRY** is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native to Kenya and Indomalaysia it has small, glossy white or yellowish-green flowers.

It is also known as Ache root, *Al* (Hindi), Awl tree, *Bois douleur* (French), Brimstone tree, Chiddle grape, *Feuille froid* (Dominican), Hog apple, *Indischer Maulbeerbaum* (German), *Kura* (Fijian), *Mengkudu* (Malay), *Mora de la India* (Spanish), *Morinda*, *Noni* (French Polynesian, German, Hawaiian), *Nonu* (Samoan, Tongan), Painkiller, *Pau-azeitona* (Portuguese), and Rotten cheese fruit.

The flower clusters fuse to form the fruit (like a pineapple, *Ananas comosus*). The timber has been called Canarywood.

*Citrifolia* is made up of the genus name *Citrus* and Latin *-folia* (leaved) components meaning ‘with leaves like those of that genus’.

In Java the young leaves offer a vegetable and the older ones have been used to wrap cooked food.

Generally the unappetising-smelling, pale yellow or green to white fruit seem to be viewed as a famine food – although some authorities have noted that in mainland countries on the south-east Asian peninsular (sometimes referred to as Indo-China) they have been eaten with salt.

Malaysians have used the fruit pulp as a shampoo, and also as a cleaner for iron or steel.

The root bark yields a permanent red dye (which when fixed with a *Symplocos* species as mordant has been referred to as ‘Turkey red’). This has been used on linen and wool – and in Malaysia is familiar in batik designs. A yellow dye can be obtained from the root bark or the trunk.

Apparently Indian mulberry is the source of a fetid-smelling, insecticidal hair oil used in south-eastern Asia.

Indian mulberry is cultivated in Java and India primarily for its root bark and the dye this yields whereas Malaysians are said to grow it particularly for medicinal purposes. Overall authorities on the south-eastern Asian region suggest that Indian mulberry’s dye-producing qualities (from the trunk and the roots) are its dominant attributes there – and that the marginally edible fruit, the vegetable leaves, essential oil, medicinal virtues and timber benefits are of secondary importance.

The plant’s wide distribution has promoted some debate among botanists. They recognize that the bladder-like air-sacs attached to the seeds provide them with a high degree of buoyancy which would enable them to be carried safely for long distances to other shores by ocean currents. However they suspect that man has also played a fairly significant part and in the case of Hawaii for instance it is considered likely by some that the intrepid Polynesian sailors took it with them there during their first migrations.

Medicinally, Malaysian herbalists have used the plant in a wide range of treatments from easing fever, liver and kidney diseases and beriberi to diabetes, internal bleeding and coughs. Additionally in Hawaii (where it was introduced) the mashed young fruit mixed either with fruit juice or salt were applied to deep cuts and broken bones, and according to authorities the Country’s leaf and stem bark remedy for tuberculosis was of high

repute. Caribbeans make a leaf poultice to ease pain or heal wounds and Barbadians apply it for easing fever and headaches. The plant has also been used to treat high blood pressure and forms of cancer.