

Muntingia calabura

JAMAICAN CHERRY is an evergreen tree. Native to tropical South America it has small, fragrant creamy-white flowers with many yellow-tipped stamens.

It is also known as *Bois ramier* (French), *Bolaina yamanaza* (Peruvian), *Buah ceri* (Malay), Calabur-tree, Calubura, *Capulin* (Fijian), *Capulín blanco* (Spanish), Capulin cherry, *Cereza* (Spanish), Cherry tree, Chinese cherry, Cotton candy fruit, *Datiles* (Filipino/Tagalog), Jam fruit, Jam tree, Japanese cherry, *Kerkup siam* (Malay), Manila cherry, *Manzanilla* (Guamanian), Ornamental cherry, Panama berry, Panama cherry, Singapore cherry, Strawberry-tree, *Takhop-farang* (Thai), and West Indian cherry.

The flowers last one day. Some authorities claim the fruit have a fig-like taste while others suggest that it is more strawberry-like.

Calabura is a local name.

The small smooth, pink, red or yellow berries are eaten raw (particularly by children) or used as a culinary ingredient like strawberries (*Potentilla*). Locally the flowers or the leaves (in Venezuela for example) have been infused to make a tea.

Birds and fruit bats are also said to be partial to the fruit and thus disperse the seeds. Records also suggest that fish enjoy the fruit too. It would appear that Brazilian fishermen have been known to grow the trees on riverbanks so that the ripe fruit fall in the water and attract their prey.

Various re-forestation projects focussed on areas of poor soil in which Jamaican cherry would certainly grow are including the tree in their calculations not least because of the advantage of rapid seed dispersal by enthusiastic birds and bats.

In the Caribbean the soft pliable bark fibre provides local material for rope.

The tree is often cultivated as both a shade tree and an ornamental plant.

Jamaican cherry was introduced to Malaysia in the 20th Century and is said to have first flowered in Singapore in 1910.

The lightweight and durable, reddish-brown wood has been used for general carpentry and for making small boxes and casks. It has also been burnt as fuel – particularly for cooking as apparently it ignites easily and produces an intense heat with little smoke. Now at the turn of the 20th and 21st Centuries the suitability of the wood for paper pulp is also being considered in Brazil.

Authorities on south-eastern Asia indicate that in that region Jamaican cherry's prime importance is as a fruit tree and that appreciation of medicinal, fibre or shade attributes are secondary to this.

Medicinally, a flower infusion (which would have antiseptic qualities) has offered a local treatment for headaches and colds in the Philippines. They have also been used to ease spasms.