

*Oroxylum indicum*

[Synonyms : *Arthrophyllum ceylanicum*, *Arthrophyllum reticulatum*, *Bignonia indica*, *Bignonia pentandra*, *Calosanthus indica*, *Spathodea indica*]

**TREE OF DAMOCLES** is a semi-deciduous tree. Native to Indomalaysia it has leaflets that turn red, orange and purplish-brown in Autumn, and musty-fetid smelling, reddish-brown outside to pink inside, yellow flowers followed by hanging clusters of sword-like and often very long, black fruit pods.

It is also known as *Arlu* (Hindi), Bat tree, *Bungli* (Javanese), *Kapung-kapung* (Sumatran), *Kharkath* (Hindi), *Kulai* (Malay), *Merkulai* (Malay), Midnight horror, *Núc nác* (Vietnamese), *Peka* (Thai), *Pong-porang* (Sundanese), *Shyonaka* (Sanskrit), *Tatun-syonark* (Gujarati), and *Totila* (Singhalese).

The narrow, hanging and downward-curving, black fruit pods can be as much as four feet in length.

Flowers open at night and are pollinated by bats.

*Indicum* means ‘of or from India (or from the East Indies or from the Far East)’.

Locally in Burma (called today Myanmar) and Malaya the young leaflets have been cooked as a vegetable, while in Java (now part of Indonesia) the woody flowers and the bark have provided food.

Both the black fruit pods and the light greyish-brown bark yield black dyes that have been used for tanning and dyeing – and the black dye has been applied in the Malaysian state of Sarawak to rattan basketry.

Vets in India have used the seeds in treatments for cattle.

In some countries the soft, yellowish-white wood has been used to make matches.

Some authorities on south-eastern Asia have claimed that the region looks to the tree primarily for its medicinal properties before recognising it as a source of fruit or vegetables, timber or an agent for dyeing and tanning materials.

Medicinally, the bitter-tasting bark (usually from the root) which can be found for sale in local Asian markets has been used to treat some stomach upsets and taken as a bitter tonic. In some areas leaf poultices have been applied to ease headaches while a wad of leaves has been placed against an offending tooth to counter pain. Asian medicine has also used a leaf decoction for cholera and fever generally, as well as during childbirth. Chinese medicine uses the seeds – and local Indian medicine has used the root in remedies for tuberculosis and the bark for treating diarrhoea and dysentery. Malaysian medicine has employed a leaf decoction for dealing with stomach disorders, rheumatism and loss of appetite.