

Pachira aquatica

[Synonyms : *Bombax aquaticum*, *Bombax glabra*, *Bombax insigne*, *Bombax macrocarpum*, *Bombax rigidifolium*, *Carolinea grandiflora*, *Carolinea macrocarpa*, *Carolinea princeps*, *Carolinea sofia*, *Pachira aquatica* var. *occidentalis*, *Pachira aquatica* var. *surinamensis*, *Pachira aquaticum*, *Pachira glabra*, *Pachira grandiflora*, *Pachira longiflora*, *Pachira macrocarpa*, *Pachira pustulifera*, *Pachira spruceana*, *Pachira villosula*, *Pachira villulosa*, *Pachira villusula*, *Sophia carolina*]

FRENCH PEANUT is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native from southern Mexico to Guyana and northern Brazil, it has very-large, ball-like, green to creamy-white or pink to purple flowers with very long, curled-back petals and many long, creamy-white stamens.

It is also known as American chestnut, *Apombo* (Spanish), *Cacao de playa* (Nicaraguan), *Cacaoyer-rivière* (French), *Cacaude monte* (Colombian), *Castanheiro de Guiana* (Portuguese), *Castaño de Guayana* (Spanish), *Ceibillo* (Venezuelan), *Chila blanca* (Salvadoran), Guiana chestnut, Guiana waterchestnut, Guinea chestnut, Guyana chestnut, *Kakaobaum* (German), Malabar chestnut, Money tree, *Mungaba* (Portuguese), *Noisetier de la Guyane* (French), Nut of hefty fellow, *Paineira-de-cuba* (Spanish), Provision bark, Provision tree, *Quirihillo* (Costa Rican), Saba nut, *Sapotolón* (Ecuadorean), Shaving brush tree, *Tsine* (Venezuelan), Water chestnut, Wild chataigne (Trinidadian), Wild cocoa tree, *Wilder cacaobaum* (German), *Wilder kakaobaum* (German), *Zapote bobo* (Mexican), *Zapote de agua* (Mexican), *Zapotolongo* (Colombian), *Zapotón* (Belizean and Guatemalan), and *Zumzapote* (Guatemalan).

Each flower blooms for one day and is fragrant at night. The seeds enlarge until ripe when the fruit pod bursts open allowing them to fall to the ground – or into the water where they can be carried far afield by ocean currents.

Aquatica means ‘growing in or near water’.

Locally although the nuts (with their peanut like *Arachis hypogaea*-taste) have been eaten raw more often they have been roasted or fried (or even boiled) when they take on a chestnutty *Castanea sativa* flavour. They have also been ground to make bread flour. The flowers and young leaves have been eaten as a cooked vegetable.

The greenish bark or bark fibre has provided material locally for making kitchen utensils, cordage, and general handicrafts. It also yields a red dye.

In Amazonia the pale pink to orange wood has been used locally for making buoys. On a larger scale the wood has also been chosen for building interiors and general carpentry, as well as for making kitchenware. It has been considered suitable for paper pulp too.

French peanut has been cultivated for some time in the extreme south of North America as an ornamental garden (or potted) plant. At the beginning of the 21st Century however it appears to have attracted fashionable interest as a conservatory pot plant in Europe too – as well as the attentions of bonsai enthusiasts. The tree has been cultivated as an ornamental plant in some parts of south-eastern Asia and can be a familiar sight in Indian gardens.

Authorities on south-eastern Asia believe that the plant is valued in that region primarily as a source of vegetable oils and fats.

Medicinally, the bark has provided local medicine for treating diabetes.

