

*Pereskia aculeata*

[Synonyms : *Cactus lucidus*, *Cactus pereskia*, *Pereskia aculeata* var. *godseffiana*, *Pereskia aculeata* var. *lanceolata*, *Pereskia aculeata* var. *longispina*, *Pereskia aculeata* var. *rotundifolia*, *Pereskia aculeata* var. *rubescens*, *Pereskia foetens*, *Pereskia fragrans*, *Pereskia godseffiana*, *Pereskia longispina*, *Pereskia pereskia*, *Pereskia rubescens*, *Pereskia undulata*]

**LEMON VINE** is a semi-evergreen, climbing vine-like cactus. Native to the tropical Americas, it has small rose-like, strongly lemony-fragrant, sometimes pink-tinged, creamy-yellow or white flowers with orange-red stamens.

It is also known as American gooseberry, Barbados gooseberry, Barbados shrub, *Barbadosstekelbessie* (Afrikaans), *Bladappel* (Surinamese), Blade apple, *Buganvilla blanca* (Mexican), Gooseberry shrub, *Grosellero de novia* (Cuban), *Guamacho* (Venezuelan), Leaf cactus, Leafy cactus, *Ora-pro-nobis* (Brazilian), *Pereskia* creeper, Primitive cactus, *Qwaningi* (Zulu), *Ramo de novia* (Cuban), Spanish gooseberry, Sweet Mary, and West Indian gooseberry.

Lemon vine has been declared an invasive noxious weed in South Africa and Australia.

*Aculeata* is derived from Latin *aculeus* (point, sting) meaning ‘prickly’.

One of the common names is apposite, Primitive cactus. Authorities point out that lemon vine is effectively a ‘snapshot in time’ as it illustrates a stage in the development of plants towards today’s cacti as they adapted to a desert climate.

The juicy, tartish-tasting small, orange-yellow berries are most often stewed or preserved with sugar – notably as jam. They are also eaten raw. The slightly fleshy, glossy dark-green leaves have been cooked as a vegetable and used as a flavouring in savoury dishes, especially in the Brazilian countryside where they have also been fed to livestock.

In its native habitat, and elsewhere in the tropics, this cactus is grown as a spiny hedging (the cane-like, green stems bear long, slender and hooked, needle-like, woolly brown spines) and as an ornamental plant. Less often it is also cultivated for its fruit and foliage.

Fruit are enjoyed by animals and birds which then disperse the tiny black seeds.

This is another plant reviewed by authorities on south-eastern Asia and there they believe its value is first as a hedging plant and then as a source of food.

Some authorities report that in South Africa lemon vine has created havoc. Records do not seem to state when the cactus was first introduced to the Country although they note proof that the fruit were being used to make jam in 1881. The plant has been spread by wildlife that feed on the fruit and from garden rubbish (detached leaves and stems have been shown to be capable of forming roots months after parting from their parent plant). It now overruns native habitat in pockets, especially in coastal forests and around graveyards or kraals for which the thorny plant was popularly cultivated as an impenetrable barrier for wildlife – so much so that it has been declared to be an illegal noxious weed and its cultivation in South Africa has been banned.

Medicinally, local Brazilian medicine uses leaf poultices as a soothing application on inflammation and tumours.