

Phyllanthus acidus

[Synonyms : *Averrhoa acida*, *Cicca acida*, *Cicca disticha*, *Phyllanthus distichus*]

GOOSEBERRY TREE is a semi-deciduous shrub or tree. Native to tropical southern Asia (particularly India and Madagascar) it has directly from trunk or branches clusters of tiny, pinkish flowers.

It is also known as *Aranelli* (Malaysian, Tamil), *Bangkiling* (Filipino), *Cereme* (Indonesian), *Cereza amarilla* (Puerto Rican), *Cerezo agrio* (Venezuelan), *Cerezo comun* (Puerto Rican), *Cerezo de la tierra* (Puerto Rican), *Cerezo occidental* (Cuban), *Cěрмаi* (Malaysian), *Chamin-chamin* (Malaysian), *Cheramina* (Jamaican), *Cheremai* (Malaysian), *Cherimbillier* (Vietnamese), *Chermai* (Malaysian), *Cherme* (Javanese), *Chěrmela* (Malaysian), *Chum ruot* (Vietnamese), *Ciruela corteña* (Mexican), Country gooseberry, Damsel, *Groseillier des Antilles* (French West Indian), *Groselha* (Brazilian), *Grosella* (Costa Rican, Cuban, Guatemalan, Nicaraguan), *Guinda* (Salvadoran), *Harfarauri* (Hindi), *Hariphal* (Bengali), *Iba'* (Filipino/Tagalog), Indian gooseberry, *Jimbelin* (Jamaican), *Jimbling* (Indian, Jamaican), *Kantuet* (Cambodian), *Karmay* (Filipino/Tagalog), *Kemangor* (Malaysian), *Lavaliphala* (Sanskrit), *Lavani* (Sanskrit), *Mak-nhom* (Lao), Malay gooseberry, *Manzana estrella* (Mexican), *Ma-yom* (Thai), *Nhom baanz* (Lao), *Noari* (Bengali), Otaheite gooseberry, *Pimienta* (Salvadoran), *Rata-nelli* (Sanskrit), *Siri-nelli* (Sanskrit), *Stachelbeerbaum* (German), Star gooseberry, Tahitian gooseberry, Tahitian gooseberry tree, *Tam duot* (Vietnamese), *Tjareme* (Javanese), *Tjerme* (Javanese), West India gooseberry, and Wild plum.

The small and edible, turban-like, waxy yellowish-green fruit have flesh with a very sour gooseberry-like (*Ribes uva-crispa*) taste.

Warning – the sap or latex in some parts of the plant can act as an emetic and purgative. *Acidus* means 'acid or sour'.

Gooseberry tree has been cultivated widely in some tropical areas for centuries, primarily for its very sour-tasting fruit – although it is recorded that it has been grown as an ornamental plant as well, certainly in India and the Philippines. This is partially acknowledged by authorities on south-eastern Asia who declare that today it is foremost a source of edible fruit in that region – and that it then offers medicine and poison.

Locally the fruit are made into pies, pastries, sauces and jellies, as well as pickles, chutneys, candied fruit and other preserves (they are sometimes preserved in salt for example). They are also used for flavouring. Their use in jam-making is not only for themselves (when they produce a red jam) but also in a lesser role with other ingredients as they help other fruit to set. In the Philippines the fruit juice has been added to cold drinks and the fruit have also been used to make vinegar. Both Indians and Indonesians have eaten the young leaves as a cooked vegetable too.

Root bark has been used for tanning in India. While in parts of south-eastern Asia juice extracted from the root bark has had more sinister associations as it has been used for murder.

Medicinally, local Indian herbalists have employed the leaves and roots to counter snake bites. They have also turned to the leaves for treating rheumatism and some venereal disease, and the fruit have provided a liver tonic. Malaysian medicine although recognising the

roots' poisonous qualities has used the steam from boiled root for easing headaches and coughs, and has also chosen the root for treatments for asthma on the one hand and skin disease on the feet on the other.