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Piscidia piscipula

[Synonyms : *Erythrina piscipula*, *Ichthyomethia americana*, *Ichthyomethia communis*, *Ichthyomethia piscipula*, *Ichthyomethia piscipula* var. *typica*, *Piscidia americana*, *Piscidia communis*, *Piscidia erythrina*, *Piscidia inebrians*, *Piscidia toxicaria*, *Robinia alata*]

JAMAICAN DOGWOOD is a deciduous tree. Native to Florida (United States) and the West Indies it has pea-like lavender or red-streaked, blue-purple to white flowers.

It is also known as Fish fuddle, Fish-poison tree, Florida fishpoison tree, Jamaica dogwood, Jamaica fishfuddle tree, and West Indian dogwood.

Warning – overdoses of bark, leaves, twigs or root can be poisonous and can cause gastric problems and nausea. Fruit pods and seeds can cause dizziness and coma.

Piscipula is derived from Latin *piscis* (fish) and *capere* (catch) components with reference to the fish poison that can be extracted from this species.

The South American Indian practice of stunning fish for an easier catch by using the pounded leaves and young branches (or powdered root or stem bark) accounts for two of the common names above. This level of poisoning seems only to apply however to cold-blooded creatures.

Today the very heavy, yellowish-brown wood is used for boat-building and also offers a source of charcoal and fuel.

Medicinally, for humans it has been used not only as a painkiller and sedative, but also as a remedy for insomnia, neuralgia, period pain, asthma and whooping-cough. Relatively recent scientific research suggests that the plant could be useful in treating coughs and reducing fever.