

*Pistacia vera*

[Synonyms : *Pistacia narbonensis*, *Pistacia reticulata*]

**PISTACHIO** is a deciduous tree. Native from Iran to central Asia it has small, reddish-green flowers.

It is also known as *Echte Pistazie* (German), *Frestag* (Arabic), Green almond, *Mantelipistaasi* (Finnish), *Pista* (Bengali, Hindi), *Pistacchio* (Italian), Pistache (English, French), *Pistachier* (French), *Pistachier cultivé* (French), Pistachio-nut, *Pistacho* (Spanish), *Pistacio vera* (Esperanto), *Pista gond* (Urdu), *Pistah-fanduk* (Persian), *Pistaschmandel* (Swedish), *Pistazie* (German), *Řečík pistáciový* (Czech), and True pistachia.

The flowers are pollinated by the wind.

Chlorophyll causes the characteristic green colour associated with pistachio.

The fully ripe small oval, reddish-brown shelled nuts are collected (often already opened to reveal the nut). The outer covering is removed in running water, and the nuts are then dried and the pale-green kernels removed.

*Vera* is Latin (true, genuine) meaning 'true or standard' with reference to the species as typical of the genus.

Pistachio nut remains (dating back to 6750 BC) have been found by archaeologists at Jarmo (in today's northern Iraq). According to some authorities this tree has been cultivated for at least 3,000 years. In 700 BC it was growing in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. [At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries there are some authorities who debate the actual existence of Babylon's Hanging Gardens.] This and the almond (*Prunus dulcis* var. *dulcis*) are the only nuts to be mentioned in the Old Testament of the *Bible*. Pistachio was known in Persia (now Iran) from 6 BC, and was also familiar to the ancient Greeks.

It is a long held tradition that Vitellius (15-69) who was Roman Emperor very briefly before he was murdered, introduced pistachio to Rome during the reign of Tiberius (14-37 BC). However some authorities contend that it first reached European shores via Sicily where it had been introduced by the Arabs. (Today it covers acres of land on that Island.) The nuts were obtainable in France as a luxury in the Middle Ages where they were an ingredient in sauces. However authorities believe they were not imported by England until the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

Now many of the nuts commercially retailed in the West come from Turkey. They are still extremely popular as confectionery sold (in cold weather especially) in the bazaars and coffee houses of Greece and other countries well into western Asia, where they are known as *pista* or *pistakion*. In the West they are also fairly popular and used commercially as a flavouring in a wide range of foods including confectionery, ice creams, sausages, puddings and sauces.