

Pithecellobium dulce

[Synonyms : *Acacia obliquifolia*, *Albizia dulce*, *Feuillea dulcis*, *Inga camatchii*, *Inga dulcis*, *Inga javana*, *Inga lanceolata*, *Inga leucantha*, *Inga pungens*, *Mimosa dulcis*, *Mimosa edulis*, *Mimosa pungens*, *Mimosa unguis-cati*, *Pithecellobium littorale*, *Pithecolobium littorale*, *Zygia dulcis*]

MANILA TAMARIND is a spiny deciduous tree. Native to Mexico and Central America, it has small mimosa-like fluffy, fragrant green to pale yellow flowers with very many prominent stamens.

It is also known as Ape's earring, Blackbead, Bread-and-cheese tree, Camachile tree, *Camambilarinde* (German), *Cassie de Manille* (French), *Dakhanibabul* (Hindi), *Épine de Madras* (French), *Gorasamli* (Gujarati), *Guamúchil* (Spanish), *Guayamochil* (Spanish), *Huamúchil* (Spanish), *Kamachili* (Filipino/Tagalog, Guamanian), *Karkapilli* (Tamil), *Kataiya* (Fijian), Madras thorn, *Madre de flecha* (Spanish), *Makam tet* (Thai), *Ma kham khong* (Thai), *Ma kham thet* (Thai), Monkeypod, Ngapi nut, Opiuma (English, Hawaiian), *Pois sucré* (French), *Seeme hunse* (Tamil), *Simachinta* (Telugu), Sweet inga, *Tamarin de l'Inde* (French), and *Tamarin de Manille* (French).

The flowers are pollinated by bees.

Wounded bark exudes a reddish-brown gum. When mature the small spiralling fruit pods split down both sides. The large flat, glossy black seeds (or nuts) are said to have a smell similar to fermenting fish.

An edible green oil is extracted from the refined and bleached seeds.

Warning – tanners are known to have experienced eye irritation from the bark's sap and its contact with the skin can cause inflammation.

In Hawaii the tree is viewed as a highly invasive weed.

Dulce is Latin (sweet, pleasant, delightful) with reference to the fruit pod and its pulp.

The common name Ngapi nut refers to its smell of fermenting fish (the Burmese name – Burma is referred to as Myanmar today – for their traditional fermented fish paste).

The green or pinkish-red fruit pods can be found for sale in local markets, and it is said that in Cuba, Mexico and Thailand the sight of the harvested pods for sale on the roadside is traditional. Pods are boiled for eating and the fruit pulp is eaten raw or made into a lemonade-type drink or other sweet-and-sour beverage. The flowers and young red shoots have also provided food (a Javanese side dish). Some authorities note that the large flat seeds are eaten raw or roasted in Burma (called today Myanmar), Indonesia and India and in the latter they are also added fresh to curries. A good quality honey is obtained from the flowers.

Some birds and animals (including monkeys and livestock) enjoy the thickish leathery fruit pods. In Mexico and Hawaii they are eaten by cattle – and one of the birds in Hawaii, the false myna bird, seems to be singled out particularly as enjoying the fruit (the seed of which it then randomly distributes). In many places, for example Sudan or the Indian foothills, the foliage (including collected hedge clippings) has provided fodder for livestock and the trees can withstand heavy browsing by sheep, cattle, horses and goats. The remains of seeds processed for oil have also provided animal feed.

The green oil has been used for making soap and has also been used in preparing food.

The brownish-grey bark, which in Mexico, India and the Philippines has certainly been used for tanning, yields a yellow dye as well as an adhesive gum. Some authorities have suggested that the sap obtained from the wounded bark could offer an alternative to gum arabic (*Acacia senegal*).

Locally the brittle wood has been burnt as fuel despite the fact that it smokes badly – a problem which does not seem to have deterred some of the Indian brick kiln operators. .And in India, if nowhere else, this strong and heavy durable, reddish-brown wood has provided material for making door panelling, posts, carts, railway sleepers and packing cases. It has also been used in some places for general construction.

In Hawaii where it was introduced in about 1870 the shiny black seeds are included in leis.

The tree is cultivated widely along roadsides for its shade and it is also grown as a nearly impenetrable, thorny hedging. It is also grown as an ornamental plant (not least it has been sculpted by topiarists). In some places however such as southern Florida the thorny foliage has proved to be sufficiently aggressive to counter any advantages it might offer as a street tree. One other disadvantage is that the tree is top heavy – not only are branches liable to break off in strong wind but the whole tree can be brought down. Manila tamarind has shown that it can be invasive too as in Hawaii for instance it has shaded out other forage plants and infested pasture. Notwithstanding these drawbacks the tree has participated in rehabilitation programmes in some countries and has also been grown to provide shelter or a windbreak.

According to south-east Asian authorities it is the plant's tannin-producing qualities which are of prime importance in the region. The fact that it also offers vegetable oil, edible fruit, timber, gum, hedging, shade on roadsides and fuel as well is believed to be of secondary importance.

Medicinally, local herbalists have used parts of the tree for treating a wide range of disorders and ailments from leprosy, dysentery, convulsions, indigestion, diarrhoea, internal ulcers and venereal disease to sores, toothache and earache.