

Plumbago auriculata

[Synonyms : *Plumbago capensis*]

PLUMBAGO (English, French) is a semi-evergreen, semi-climbing shrub. Native to South Africa it has small scented, primrose-like, pale blue flowers.

It is also known as Blue plumbago, *Blybomma* (Swedish), Cape leadwort, Cape plumbago, *Dentelaire du Cap* (French), *Embeleso* (Canary Island), *Kap-Bleiwurz* (German), *Kap-Blyrod* (Danish), Leadwort, *Mlékosed kapský* (Czech), *Olověnc ouškatý* (Czech), *Plumbago* (Portuguese), Shrubby plumbago, South African leadwort, and *Syselbos* (Afrikaans); and in flower language it is said to be a symbol of holy wishes.

Warning – leaves, stems and especially root or powdered bark are poisonous. Taken internally plumbago can cause heart problems and respiratory failure, and used externally it can cause blistering. It can be poisonous for some animals.

Auriculata is derived from Latin *auricula* (ear lobe) meaning ‘with ear-like lobes’.

Some African tribes (including the Xhosa) believed that lightning was repelled if a piece of stem was placed above the entrance door. On the other hand the addition of the root bark to bathing water was believed to be helpful in reuniting alienated couples if both parties washed themselves in it.

Plumbago is familiar as a hedging-plant in many parts of Africa.

In Cape Province in South Africa it has been used as fodder.

Authorities believe that this species was introduced to Europe in about 1818 and had appeared in Hawaii before 1871.

Medicinally, some African tribes (including the Xhosa) and many peoples in the Far East too have treated skin disorders (including warts) with a paste made from the leaves and root. Powdered root has been used to ease headaches and treat bone fractures and wounds, and in the West Indies plumbago has been used for abortions.