

*Plumbago zeylanica*

[Synonyms : *Plumbago auriculata*, *Plumbago flaccida*, *Plumbago lactea*, *Plumbago virginica*, *Plumbago viscosa*, *Thela alba*]

**WILD LEADWORT** is a shrub. Native through south-eastern Asia to Australia it has small primrose-like, pale blue to violet-centred, white flowers.

It is also known as *Ahyewgya* (Twi), *Bama* (Javanese), Ceylon leadwort, Ceylon plumbago, *Cheraka* (Malaysian), *Chet tamun pléngkào* (Thai), *Chita* (Hindi), *Chitrak* (Punjabi and Sanskrit), *Chitraka* (Sanskrit), *Chitrak-safed* (Gujarati), *Chitramulam* (Telugu), *Daun encok* (Indonesian), *Dentelaire* (Seychellois), *Ela-nitul* (Sanskrit), *Ilie'e* (Hawaiian), *Ilihe'e* (Hawaiian), *Jarak* (Malaysian), *Ki ènchok* (Sundanese), *Lauhihi* (Hawaiian), *Lautafifi* (Samoan), Leadwort, Native plumbago, *Plumbago blanc* (Seychellois), *Poksor* (Javanese), *Sitragam* (Tamil), *Termis* (Arabic), *Tumpukstuvèli* (Malayalam), *Umatshisa* (Zimbabwean), White-flowered leadwort, White leadwort, and White plumbago.

Warning – the plant contains poisonous acrid sap. Taking this plant internally can cause internal ulcers, and sweating hands and feet.. It should not be used medicinally during pregnancy and should only be used under the supervision of a qualified practitioner. Prolonged contact can cause blistering and smarting skin.

*Zeylanica* means ‘of or from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka)’.

The plant’s poisonous acrid juice has been used in Hawaii and parts of tropical Africa to blacken tattoos.

Authorities on south-eastern Asia believe this region views the shrub primarily as a source of medicine and then as a hedge or wayside plant.

Wild leadwort is cultivated as an ornamental plant not least in some of the villages in western Africa.

The plant has been used in veterinary medicine in East Africa on cattle suffering from eye problems.

Medicinally, Hawaiian herbalists have applied various parts of the plant in pastes or poultices to some skin problems. Ancient Indian herbalists are said to have valued the root for promoting appetite – and with other drugs it has (continuing even into recent times) provided a stimulant as well. They also used this and its close relative plumbago (*Plumbago auriculata*), before castor oil plant (*Ricinus communis*) reached India and other parts of Asia via the trade routes, as a purgative regardless of concerns about any poisonous properties. Additionally Indian medicine has embraced the shrub for treating intermittent fevers, some period problems, diarrhoea, indigestion, obesity, piles, rheumatism, some skin disorders and worms. Local African medicine in Zimbabwe (known previously to Europeans initially as Rhodesia and then Southern Rhodesia) viewed the root as an aphrodisiac and also used the shrub in remedies for easing shortness of breath. In Nigeria, Tanzania (once called Tanganyika) and Côte d’Ivoire (Ivory Coast) the root (and leaf) have been ingredients in treatments for leprosy – and the root has also offered a local treatment for piles in Ghana. Local herbalists in both Tanzania and southern Nigeria have employed a leaf soup for treating in the former case oral disorders and in the latter fever and worms. The plant has been used by Chinese

herbalists in Malaya for medicinal treatments – and some Far Eastern remedies for skin problems have required the application of a rice paste mixed with the root and leaf.