

*Prosopis alba*

[Synonyms : *Prosopis atacamensis*, *Prosopis siliquastrum* var. *longisiliqua*]

**WHITE ALGARROBA** is a spiny semi-evergreen shrub or tree. Native from Argentina to Peru, it has small greenish-white to yellow flowers with slender showy stamens.

It is also known as Algaroba, Argentine mesquite, *El arbol* (Argentine), Ironwood, Jacaranda, Mesquite, and Screwbean.

*Alba* means ‘white’.

One could view the bald Argentinian name *El arbol* (meaning ‘the tree’) as a considerable complement. In north-eastern Argentina where this name is noted as most common white algaroba is not only abundant but also extremely valuable.

The twisted pale yellow fruit pods are eaten locally. These pods are milled for baking flour.

When the gummy pulp has been dried and ground it is used commercially for making a sweet-tasting syrup called Allgarrobina which in turn is used to prepare fruit drinks and cocktails.

Cattle enjoy the fruit pods too and in arid areas of South America the plant is valued as much for its shade as its browsing potential.

Both the fruit, and the sawdust from the sawmills have been used for tanning.

The tree is cultivated in plantations, along roadsides and as a windbreak. Not least for its drought tolerance it is also employed in desert reclamation schemes. Authorities report too that planners in Buenos Aires believe this tree can help deaden noise which is said to explain why they line so many of the streets there.

The striped, reddish-brown wood has been used for a wide range of purposes from flooring, paving blocks and wine casks, to shoe lasts and fuel. It has also been used for construction, pre-fabricated buildings and doors.

Medicinally, local herbalists have used the tree to treat eye inflammation.