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### *Quassia amara*

[Synonyms : *Quassia alatifolia*, *Quassia crocera*, *Quassia guianensis*, *Quassia officinalis*, *Quassia simarouba*, *Quassia simaruba*, *Simaruba amara*]

**SURINAM QUASSIA** is a shrub or tree. Native to Brazil it has dull rose-coloured flowers. It is also known as *Acajou blanc* (French Guianese), *Aceituno* (Honduran, Nicaraguan, Panamanian), *Bharangi* (Indian), Bitta wood, Bitter ash, Bitter damson, *Bitterholz* (German), *Bitterholzbaum* (German), Bitter wood, Butter damson, *Bwa-anmè* (Creole), *Caxeta* (Brazilian), *Cedro blanco* (Venezuelan), Coal wood, *Corteccia di simaruba* (Italian), *Cuasia* (Spanish), Dysentery bark, Jamaica bark, Jamaica quassia, *Kashshing* (Indian), *Kvasio amara* (Esperanto), *Maruba* (Brazilian), *Marupa* (Brazilian), Mountain damson, Orinoco simaruba bark, *Quassia* (Italian), *Quassia amara* (French), *Quássia e quina* (Portuguese), Quassia wood, *Simaroube officinale* (French), Simaruba (English, Italian, Venezuelan), *Simaruba ag* (Turkish), *Simarubabaum* (German), Slave wood, Snakewood, *Soemaroeba* (Surinamese), South American bitterwood, Stave-wood, Sumaruppa, *Surinambitterholz* (German), *Surinamkvassia* (Swedish), Surinam quassia wood, Tom-tah, and White deal.

*Amara* is Latin (bitter) with reference to the taste of the wood.

Surinam quassia was familiar as a medicine to local South American Indian tribes long before Europeans set foot on their Continent.

As an insecticide extracts of Surinam quassia mixed with sugar have provided a solution for sprays and for coating fly-papers.

Apart from any medicinal qualities the wood has been used for manufacturing plywood and for building interiors, as well as for making furniture parts, and boxes and crates.

In 1713 the bark had arrived in France from Guiana as a remedy for dysentery. Five years later France succumbed to a 6 year feverish epidemic in which the bark came into its own as it proved to be an effective treatment. In 1788 it was included in the London Pharmacopoeia. But shortly after this it was to be superseded in Britain and North America by a quassia from the West Indies *Picrasma excelsa*, a related tree with similar qualities – and progressively from the turn of the Century the bark was collected more often for these countries from the Caribbean relatives. Even now though Germany, the Netherlands and other continental European Countries still recognize *Quassia amara* officially for medicinal use.

In some European pharmacies it was once the practice to sell cups made from the wood. The idea was that these would be filled with water or tonic which was allowed to stand for a few minutes to absorb some of the wood's enhancing qualities and the liquor would then be drunk. Today however a drug is extracted from wood chips.

Medicinally, the dried root bark was used primarily to treat dysentery, malaria, fever and worms (the latter especially in children).