

Robinia pseudoacacia

[Synonyms : *Pseudoacacia odorata*, *Robinia pringlei*, *Robinia pseud-acacia*, *Robinia pseudocacia* var. *rectissima*]

FALSE-ACACIA is a deciduous tree. Native to central and south-eastern North America it has small pea-like, heavily scented, creamy white (occasionally pink) flowers.

It is also known as Acacia (English, Spanish), *Acacia a parasole* (Italian), *Agát biely* (Slovak), Bastard acacia, Bastard locust, Black acacia, Black laurel, Black locust, Common acacia, Common locust, Common locust tree, *Falsa acacia* (Italian), *Falsa gaggia* (Italian), *Falsche Akazie* (German), *Falsk akasia* (Swedish), *Faux acacia* (French), *Gemeine Scheinakazie* (German), Locust, Locust tree, North American locust tree, *Pan y queso* (Spanish), Pea-flower locust, *Robinia* (Italian, Swedish), *Robinio pseŭdoakacia* (Esperanto), *Robinie* (German), *Robinier* (French), *Robinio pseŭdoakacia* (Esperanto), *Robinja* (Maltese), *Salkim çiçeqli ag* (Turkish), *Scheinakazie* (German), Silver chain, Treesail, *Trnovník akát* (Czech), *Vanlig robinia* (Swedish), White hone flower, White laburnum, Whyo tree, Yellow acacia, and Yellow locust; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of affection beyond the grave (green), elegance, fecundity (tree), friendship, immortality of the soul (tree), menstruous blood (tree gum), platonic love, and ‘you have elegance and grace’.

The tree produces numerous thorny suckers.

An essential oil can be extracted from the flowers, and a drying oil can be extracted from the seeds.

Warning – all parts of the tree (with the possible exception of the flowers) are believed to be poisonous particularly the bark, roots and seeds. For human beings it can cause burning abdominal pain, dilated pupils, weak and irregular heart action, diarrhoea, respiratory difficulties, lassitude, nausea, severe stupor, dryness of throat, vertigo and vomiting. It should not be taken internally unless under the supervision of a qualified practitioner. For animals eg. cattle, horses, poultry, sheep, it can cause gastrointestinal problems, inco-ordination, paralysis, staggering and death.

Pseudoacacia is made up of Greek *pseudo-* (false) and the genus name *Acacia* components meaning ‘false acacia’.

The common name False-acacia arose as initially this plant which was introduced to France from North America in 1601 (some authorities say 1590) was believed to be the same as an African species of acacia. When it arrived in France Jean Robin grew false-acacia in the gardens of the Louvre in Paris.

Although it is now known that most of the tree is highly poisonous for human beings and animals some of the North American Indian tribes used to eat the cooked seeds, and used the trunk bark as a medicinal flavouring too. Mendocino Indian horses were fed the leaves, and Wailaki chickens ate the seeds. The bark was used by the Cherokee tribe to make a tea – and they also used the shrink-resistant, brown wood for fence posts and window-sills, as well as for their bows and darts for blowguns. In the Menominee Indian tribe false-acacia provided a flavouring for medicine and the Cherokee used the root to treat toothache, and chewed the root bark to cause vomiting when this was required. Cherokee cows were also fed it as a tonic.

Today the essence is used by the perfumery industry. Particularly in North America this heavy and very hard wood was once used for building ships, its strength and durability being considered far greater than that of the American oak (*Quercus alba*). But its timber was never used extensively for general construction although it is said that the first house in Boston was built with it. The wood was sought after in the early pioneering days for making wooden nails and pins as these were found to remain unaltered in size regardless of humidity. The wood can be used to make fencing but there are records of horses being poisoned and suffering severe wind from chewing the bark (the most poisonous part) on false-acacia fence posts. It has also been used for other diverse purposes including insulator pins, and mine props. Some authorities have also noted that false-acacia's ability to cope with acid conditions (aside from other useful qualities common to the family such as nitrogen-imparting properties) recommended it for use in reclaiming land which had been subjected to strip-mining. Medicinally, herbalists have used the root bark as a tonic and purgative.