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Rubia cordifolia

[Synonyms : *Rubia conotricha*, *Rubia cordifolia* subsp. *pratensis*, *Rubia longipetiolata*, *Rubia manjith*]

INDIAN MADDER is a prickly perennial climber. Native from Africa to north-eastern Asia (particularly the now Indonesian island of Java, and parts of India) it has small greenish-yellow flowers.

It is also known as Bengal madder, *Gakaraku* (Kikuyu), Madder, *Manjetti* (Malayalam), *Manjishtatige* (Telugu), *Manjista* (English, German), *Manjistha* (Bengali, Sanskrit), *Manjit* (Hindi, Punjabi), *Manjitti* (Tamil), and *Ostindischer Krapp* (German).

Cordifolia is derived from Latin *cordis* (heart) and *-folia* (leaved) components meaning 'heart-shaped leaves'.

The roots of Indian madder were being used by people living in the Indus valley, once part of northern India, as a source of a red dye as early as 3000 BC and can still be used today to dye thread. In Kenya this dye has been used on leather scabbards for swords and on leather belts.

Today this species is prepared in Java (now an Indonesian island) as a side dish to accompany rice.

Medicinally, it is used in China, and in Kenya the roots have been part of a local treatment for dysentery. While in India the stem is used to treat scorpion stings and cobra bites.