

Sarcocephalus latifolius

[Synonyms : *Nauclea esculenta*, *Nauclea latifolia*, *Sarcocephalus esculentus*, *Sarcocephalus russeggeri*]

PIN CUSHION FRUIT is a semi-climbing evergreen shrub or a tree. Native to tropical West Africa, it has round heads of fragrant, white or whitish-yellow flowers and small, edible, reddish-brown fruit.

It is also known as African cinchona, African peach, African quinine, Country fig, Doundake, Dundaki, Guinea peach, *Igbeshi* (Sierra Leonean), *Liane à fraise* (French), *Nauclea*, Negro peach, Peach root, *Pêcher africain* (French), Pin-cushion fruit, Pin-cushion tree, *Quinquina africain* (French), *Rata-bakmi* (Singhalese), Sierra Leone peach, Strawberry tree, and *Ubuluinu* (Igbo).

Warning – it is claimed that used medicinally in large doses the plant can cause abortion.

Latifolius is made up of Latin *lati-* (broad, wide) and *-folia* (leaved) components.

The warty, brownish-red fruit with their sweet apple-tasting, reddish flesh are eaten locally and can be found for sale in local markets where the creamy flower heads are bought for preparation as a vegetable.

Livestock will eat the shoots and leaves, and bees collect the nectar and pollen. Baboons are said to be particularly fond of the fruit and are responsible for their wider dispersion. It is interesting to note that without the seeds passing through a baboon's guts invariably their germination is more problematic.

In farming pin cushion fruit has been grown not only for its shade but also the shelter it can provide from wind and also for its soil stabilisation qualities. Farmers have also been known to cultivate it as a living stake or support and have used its leaves for cover or mulch.

A yellow dye obtained from the roots is used to stain Kano or Morocco leather. While the tannin in the bark is also used for dyeing.

The plant was introduced to Ceylon (today's Sri Lanka) in 1883.

Authorities claim that in south-eastern Asia at the turn of the 20th and 21st Centuries pin cushion fruit was viewed primarily as a timber tree, and then a source of both edible fruit and of medicine, then fibre and poison (the latter including insecticides). The root and stem bark have offered an ingredient for making arrow poisons.

Medicinally, the root and stem bark have long featured in local African medicine. The plant has been used in the treatment of fever, notably malaria, and also for easing jaundice, dysentery, diarrhoea and indigestion. It provides a tonic too and, as a wash has been chosen as a remedy for some oral disorders. In Zaire the plant has been used in treating diabetes while in Nigeria twigs have not only been used as toothbrushes but also as chewing sticks.