

Spartium junceum

[Synonyms : *Genista juncea*, *Spartium junceus*]

SPANISH BROOM is a deciduous shrub. Native to southern Europe, the Mediterranean and the Canary Islands, it has pea-like fragrant, rich yellow flowers.

It is also known as Broom, Broom tree, *Genista safra* (Maltese), *Ginster* (German), *Pfriemenginster* (German), Rush broom, *Rutovec sitinový* (Czech, Slovak), *Spárto* (Greek), *Vítečník sítinovitý* (Czech), and Weaver's broom.

Essence is extracted from the flowers. Fibre is extracted from the stems.

Warning – all parts of the plant are poisonous (five or six times more potent than common broom, *Cytisus scoparius*) especially the seeds. Large doses can affect the central nervous system. It can cause purging, vomiting, renal irritation and death. It must only be taken internally under a qualified practitioner's supervision. It must not be taken internally during pregnancy or if suffering from high blood pressure. In large quantities Spanish broom can be poisonous for some animals.

Junceum means 'rush- or reed-like'.

The fibre obtained from the twigs has been used to make thread, cord, canvas and a coarse cloth. Its use at sea dates back at least to the 3rd Century BC when it was found that cord made from spanish broom could actually be enhanced if it was steeped in salt water. Use of the fibre from the young shoots for thread and cloth was common until at least the end of the 19th Century in those parts of Europe where the soil was inadequate for flax (*Linum*) or hemp (*Cannabis sativa*). Apart from a source of the fibre the stems have also been used for making brooms and baskets.

Records indicate that it had been introduced to Britain before 1548 – possibly for external medicinal use initially although its ornamental qualities soon predominated.

Although the flowers' essence has not as yet attracted much attention in the perfumery industry many authorities believe it could be a useful future ingredient in perfume.

The flowers yield a yellow dye.

Despite its poisonous nature which was known to the ancient Greeks spanish broom has been recommended by past herbalists in tincture form for the treatment of fluid retention.