

Strychnos ignatii

[Synonyms : *Faba ignatia*, *Ignatia amara*, *Ignatiana philippinica*, *Strychnos hainanensis*, *Strychnos ovalifolia*, *Strychnos tieute*]

IGNATIUS BEAN is a climbing vine. It is native to Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines. It is also known as *Pipita* (Bengali, Hindi), St. Ignatius bean, St. Ignatius poison nut, *Sankt Ignatiusbohne* (German), *Strikno Ignaca* (Esperanto), and Upas tieute.

Warning – ignatius bean is an extremely poisonous plant. It can cause muscle stiffness, spasm, raised blood pressure, violent convulsions, paralysis of part of the nervous system, arrested breathing and death. In Britain this drug is only obtainable from a registered pharmacy. It is fatally poisonous for most animals.

Ignatii commemorates a Spanish founder of the Society of Jesus, St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556). In 1517 he took part in the defence of Pamplona and ended up with one broken leg and one wounded one. While recovering from these he read religious texts which encouraged him towards a life of missionary work and self-denial. Initially he joined the Benedictine Order and between 1522-1524 developed a series of *Spiritual Exercises* (about 200 pages, first published in 1548) for strengthening faith and this work, in due time, would influence instruction in Roman Catholicism. During the worst excesses of the Spanish Inquisition he was arrested twice for promoting Christianity without recognised educational guidance. In 1534, with six other ex-students of the University of Paris (which he had attended for seven years from 1528), he founded the Society of Jesus and this new Order was confirmed by Pope Paul III in 1540. Known as the Jesuits, he became their first Superior General and wrote their Constitution which was adopted in 1554. At his death the Jesuits numbered over 1000 in nine European provinces. He was canonized in 1622 by Gregory XV and Pius XI named him patron of spiritual exercises and retreats. His feast day is 31st July and he is recognised as the patron saint of Catholic soldiers.

It was Jesuit priests, in particular Georg Josef or Jacob Kamel (1661-1706), after whom the *Camelliaceae* family (since rechristened *Theaceae*) was named, who first drew Europe's attention to the medicinal properties of the seeds.

The fruit are eaten by civets and monkeys.

In the Philippines the seeds have attracted a name as an aphrodisiac.

Medicinally, it was not only used to treat some heart ailments but it was also highly respected by some advocates at one time for curing cholera. (But *nux vomica* (*Strychnos nuxvomica*) has a similar effect (as well as lethal potential) and as it is cheaper it was used more often.) This vine has also been used however to treat asthma, fluid retention, piles and rheumatism.