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Uncaria gambir

[Synonyms : *Ourouparia gambir*, *Terra japonica*, *Uncaria gambeir*]

PALE CATECHU is a climbing shrub. Native to south-eastern Asia (particularly Singapore) it has small fragrant flowers.

It is also known as *Anhudukurra* (Telugu), Bengal gambir, Catechu, Catechu pallidum, *Gambiiri* (Finnish), Gambier, *Gambir* (Malay), *Gambirkatechu* (Swedish), *Kath* (Hindi), *Khadir* (Sanskrit), *Khayer* (Bengali), and *Terra japonica*.

A black, tar-like, highly astringent, gummy, resinous substance is extracted from the leaves, young shoots and wood and eventually looks a dull powdery, dark or pale brown. It has a pleasanter, sweeter taste than that of the extract obtained from catechu (*Acacia catechu*).

Pale catechu has long been used for tanning (producing a soft, porous leather) and for dyeing and printing. It is the source of a colour known as Cutch Brown. The dye can be used on wool as well as cotton and silk.

The extract can also be used to clear beer.

Locally pale catechu is one of the plants that can be mixed with betel nut (*Areca catechu*) to make a chewing gum. It is believed to have been used in this way since the 14th Century.

Medicinally, from about 1800 pale catechu came to be used locally as a preferred alternative to catechu itself (*Acacia catechu*) in treatments for various oral disorders, as well as for dysentery and diarrhoea. Recently research has been undertaken to investigate any medicinal properties in the resinous substance extracted from the leaves, young shoots and wood.