

Wisteria sinensis

[Synonyms : *Glycine sinensis*, *Kraunhia sinensis*, *Millettia chinensis*, *Rehsonia sinensis*, *Wisteria brevidentata*, *Wisteria chinensis*, *Wisteria praecox*, *Wisteria sinensis* var. *albiflora*]

CHINESE WISTERIA is an anti-clockwise twining deciduous vine. Native to China it has small pea-like, fragrant, mauve, lilac or white flowers.

It is also known as *Blaoregn* (Danish), *Blåregn* (Swedish), Blue acacia, Blue rain, Chinese kidney bean, *Chinesische Wistarie* (German), *Glicinia* (Portuguese), *Glycine de Chine* (French), *Glyzine* (German), *Lilases* (Portuguese), *Sinisade* (Finnish), Sweet wisteria, *Vistárie čínská* (Czech), *Vistéria čínska* (Slovak), Wistaria, *Wistárie čínská* (Czech), Wisteria, and *Wistérie* (French); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of cordial welcome, and 'I cling to thee'.

Warning – bark, fruit pods and seeds are poisonous. It can cause nausea, abdominal pain, vomiting and diarrhoea.

Sinensis means 'of or from China'.

Although a description of Chinese wisteria reached western Europe by 1723 from a French Jesuit missionary in China it seems to have been heard of little beyond this for about a further 100 years. Roughly in 1812, when John Reeves (1774-1856) arrived in Canton to take up his post as Assistant Tea-Inspector for the East India Company, he recorded seeing Chinese wisteria growing in a Canton merchant's garden. (This latter gentleman was to be a sad example of English and American exploitation. At that time eleven Chinese were allowed to trade with foreigners there and this 'hong' agent was known to them as 'Consequa'. Apparently Consequa was a generous man and history notes how badly he was cheated by the foreign devils and died penniless in about 1823.) But it was not until after the end of the Opium War and the Treaty of Nanjing (signed in August 1842), when four more ports were opened up to foreign trade and Hong Kong was ceded to the British, that a plant collector was sent from England and it was first identified (growing in the wild) by a western European. This was Robert Fortune (1813-1880) who was commissioned by the Horticultural Society of London and on his first expedition to the Far East in 1843-1846 he saw Chinese wisteria running rampant over trees and hedges by some narrow mountain roads on the island of Chusan and sent the first plant of this species home.