

Ziziphus jujuba

[Synonyms : *Rhamnus zizyphus*, *Ziziphus lotus*, *Ziziphus mauritiana*, *Ziziphus sativa*, *Ziziphus vulgaris*, *Ziziphus zizyphus*]

JUJUBE (English, French, German) is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native from south-eastern Europe to China it has small highly fragrant, pale greenish-yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Badaram* (Malayalam), *Badari* (Sanskrit), *Bedara* (Malay), *Ber* (Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi), Chinese date, Chinese date plum, Chinese jujube, *Chinesische Dattel* (German), Common jujube, Dunks, French jujube, *Gangarenu* (Telugu), *Ginjo* (Spanish), *Ilandai* (Tamil), Indian cherry, Indian jujube, Indian plum, *Jujuba čínská* (Czech), Jujube berries, *Jujubier* (French), *Jujubo* (Esperanto), *Manzanas* (Spanish), *Put sa* (Thai), Red date, *Surette* (French), *Tjtjifiá* (Greek), *Unnāb* (Arabic), *Widara* (Javanese), Yellow wood, *Yuyuba* (Spanish), and *Zinzel* (Maltese): and in flower language is said to be a symbol of privation.

Warning – the fruit need to be eaten sparingly to avoid indigestion.

Jujuba means ‘lozenge-shaped’ with reference to the shape of the fruit.

There is some argument amongst botanists about the home of jujube. Some believe that it is native to Syria. However the majority of opinion appears to subscribe to the view that jujube spread from China to the Philippines – and later to Persia (now Iran), Arabia and Asia Minor. Some time during the end of the last century BC and the beginning of the 1st Century (when Octavian who founded the Roman Empire in 27 BC and became known as Augustus Caesar was in power) jujube was introduced to Italy.

By the 17th Century at least 43 varieties were known outside China.

The tough and heavy, reddish wood has provided charcoal and fuel. Agricultural implements, tent pegs, golf clubs and sandals are examples of the wide range of goods which have also been made from this strong and moderately hard wood.

The bark has been used for tanning leather.

The small plum-shaped, glossy yellowish-orange to brown fruit have been eaten in China for centuries. It has been cultivated there since at least the 4th or 3rd Centuries BC (some authorities even suspect for as long as 4,000 years, and some say that over 400 varieties can be found in China today). In a book that records recipes followed in traditional ritual, the *Lichi*, one recipe describes a suckling pig stuffed with these fruit. Today they are often preserved, dried and included in sweet pickles, added to stew and used in confectionery.

The fruit juice has been used to make a refreshing drink.

For some authorities jujube was the celebrated food of the Lotus-eaters or Lotophagi of Djerba. (Other foods have been proposed including the fruit of the southern nettle tree, *Celtis australis*.)

This is one of the suitable species for producing shellac ie. it will act as a host for an insect that secretes an orange-red substance used for instance in commercial colouring. It is reolied upon today as a commercial source and the leaves are food for a species of silkworm.

The leaves have provided fodder for camels, goats and cattle, and they are preferred by the tussah (or tussur) silkworm to those of the mulberry (*Morus*) usually enjoyed by their relatives. The fruit are also relished by livestock generally.

Medicinally, the fruit in the form of a paste (Jujube paste or *Pâté de Jujubes*) made with gum arabic (*Acacia senegal*) and sugar was used for coughs. The roots were once used for treating fever, and in the Philippines bowel disorders as well. In India the bark and seeds have been employed as a remedy for diarrhoea. Today the fruit are still included in some proprietary cough medicines. In the Far East jujube is believed to improve muscular strength and body weight, as well as being able to protect the liver and offer an ulcer (formed through stress) preventative. The root has been used to treat external ulcers and wounds.