

The Cashew Tree

(*Anacardium occidentale*) which is known locally as Cashew, Gajus or Jambu Golok belongs to the family Anacardiaceae (others in this family include Mango and Pistachio). It originates in the Tropical Americas (Brazil) and was introduced to Peninsular Malaysia by the Portuguese. The name cashew is derived from the Portuguese 'caju' and *Anacardium* from Greek 'ana' which means 'upwards' and 'cardium' which means 'heart'.



The tree has spreading branches, bears simple leathery leaves and flowers in groups on terminal branches. Flowers are greenish-white which turn a rose-pink. The fruit (nut) is kidney-shaped and hangs below an enlarged pear-shaped stalk called the 'Apple'.

The nut must be processed before consumption as it contains anacardic acid which can cause skin inflammation resulting in blisters/rashes, and gastroenteritis when ingested.

The nut is served as a snack and is used in recipes in Indian cooking (korma). The pulp of the cashew apple can be

processed into a liqueur or a sweet astringent drink. The shell or skin of the nut is very corrosive and handlers need to wear protective gloves during the 'shelling' process. This outer skin can be processed into lubricants and paint components. Other parts of the tree can be used to treat snake bites.

Nutrition-wise, 100g of the nut produces 553 calories, 44g of total fats, no sodium (Na), high in potassium (K), high in proteins and vitamins particular D and B12 and is also high in calcium (Ca), copper (Cu), Manganese (Mn). Magnesium (Mg) and Phosphorus (P). As with other nuts cashews are rich in anti-oxidants.

Total world production of raw cashew nuts in 2012 amounts to a staggering 4.15 mil metric tons, of which 1.2 mil metric tons from Vietnam.