

MIZORAM

State Tree: Nagkesar

Botanical Name: *Mesua ferrea* L.

Family: Clusiaceae

Common Names: Nahor (Assamese); Ceylon Ironwood, Indian Rose Chestnut (English); Nag Champa, Nagkesar (Hindi); Dieng-ngai (Khasi); Herse (Lushai); Vainavu (Malayalam); Nageshor (Manipuri); Thorlachampa (Marathi); Ngai-ching (Naga); Tadinangu (Tamil); Narmishka (Urdu).

Etymology: The specific epithet, '*ferrea*' means iron which is attributed to its heavy hardwood.



Description: An evergreen, middle-sized, handsome tree with a dense conical crown; bark smooth and grey but generally warty in young trees. Leaves opposite-decussate, lanceolate or narrowly elliptic-oblong, rounded at base, bluntly long-acuminate at apex, 6.5 – 1.8 × 1.2 – 5 cm, red when young. Flowers solitary, terminal, 3.8 – 7.5 cm across, very fragrant. Sepals 4, 1 – 1.5cm long, imbricate, persistent. Petals 4, cuneate, obovate or obcordate, white, very finely brown or purple-veined. Stamens many; filaments slender; anthers linear, 2.5 – 5 mm long, golden yellow. Ovary ovoid; style long; stigma peltate. Capsules ovoid, pointed, 3 – 4 cm across, 1-4 seeded. Seeds oily pale-yellow, cotyledons fleshy.

Flowering & Fruiting: April – May and August – October.

Range of Distribution: India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Economic Importance: It is used in making railway sleepers, bridges, posts, beam poles, musical

instruments, gun-stock, and in the boat building, construction work. The oleoresin obtained from the tree may be used for varnish. The seeds contain fatty oil which has been found excellent for soap-making. Strung with thin strip of bamboo they are often used as candles which burn steadily with reddish light but give a heavy smoke. Fruits are edible.

Traditional Knowledge: The wood is used for making large a wooden pestle for pounding rice and the dark-red wood is used for house posts and tool-handles.

Medicinal Uses: The stamens yield the drug Nagakesar. Seeds and heartwood have anti-inflammatory properties. Volatile oil from the flowers showed antibacterial activities and it is used to cure cough and indigestion. The oil from the seeds shows antifungal activity against a number of pathogenic fungi and is used as cure for skin ailments.

Note: This arboreal species is common and generally gregarious in almost all evergreen forests, where the ground is more or less hilly. It thrives best in a locality with heavy rainfall and humid atmosphere, much cultivated in gardens and avenues. The plant acts as sink for dust pollutants. It can be identified by its conspicuous, fragrant, white flowers with golden yellow anthers.

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