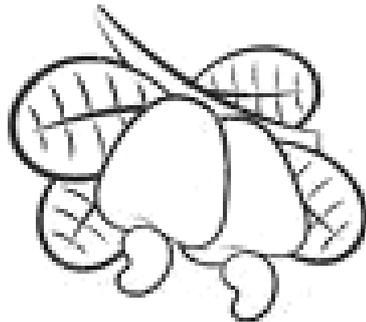
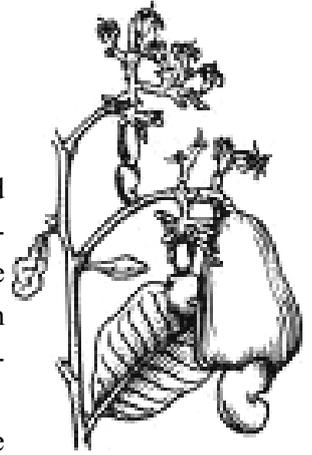


Cashew

Botanical name: *Anacardium occidentale*

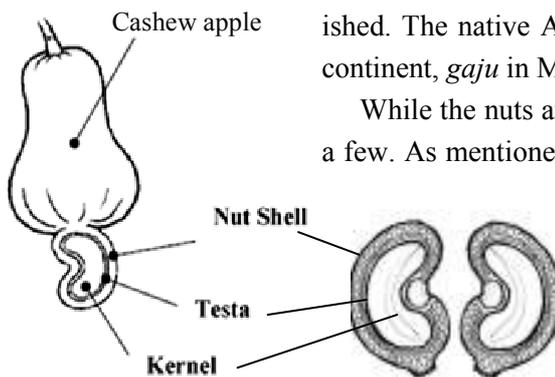
Family: *Anacardium*

The evergreen cashew tree is a beautiful tropical tree which bears scented rose-coloured blooms and a strange fruit – a fruit that carries its seed outside, not in. This seed is enclosed in a thick shell which hangs off at the end of the fruit. The fruit (referred to as the apple) is pear-shaped and has a shiny skin which turns orange-red when ripe. Although edible, it is better consumed pickled or preserved in syrup as it is quite astringent. The people of Goa, southern India, use it to make a spirit called *feni*.



When the fruit is ripe, both nut and ‘apple’ fall to the ground. The apple is fragile and does not keep for long. The nut is in a hard double C-shaped shell. The tissue between the shells contains the irritant substances cardol and anacardic acid, known to cause skin blisters. This makes cracking open the double shell to get the kernel inside a difficult task. The usual way is to roast or boil it whole, driving off the irritants and making the shell brittle or soft enough to crack without damaging the contents.

Cashew is native to tropical America. As long ago as the 16th century, it was taken by the Portuguese to Goa, on the south-west coast of India, where it flourished. The native American name of the nut is *acaju*, it became *kaju* on the Indian sub-continent, *gaju* in Malaysia, *casoy* in the Philippines, and cashew is the English name.



While the nuts are prized in many areas of the world, the fruits are only appreciated by a few. As mentioned earlier, *feni*, a clear spirit distilled from the cashew fruit and high in alcohol, is the local alcoholic drink in Goa, southern India. While it is drunk neat by some, a tamer version can be made by mixing a small amount of *feni* with fresh coconut juice, sweet syrup and crushed ice, for a thirst-quenching yet still quite potent drink! In Brazil, the cashew juice is a popular drink, usually served with a pinch of salt to taste. In areas where only the nuts are esteemed, the fruits are usually

left on the ground for animals to eat. They are a favourite food of monkeys.

Cashew kernels have a sweet and milky taste. In Asia, they are boiled or pan fried with spices such as turmeric and garlic, sprinkled with salt and chilly powder and served as a snack. Southern Asian cuisine often makes use of cashews in place of almonds as the nuts are locally grown and much cheaper than the imported almond. They are often added, whole, crushed or ground, to savoury dishes. Western cuisine tends to prefer the nuts roasted. When roasted, the texture becomes more crunchy and the taste stronger. Seasoned with a bit of salt, roasted cashews make a delicious and nutritious snack or appetizer. When ground and sweetened, they make nice fillings for cakes and pastries.

The fruit contains a sizable amount of vitamin C, apparently more than in some citrus fruit. The nut, like other nuts, is high in unsaturated ‘good’ fat and it also contains dietary fibre, plus many beneficial minerals and nutrients. However, as is said often enough, fat is still fat, and moderation is the word of the day – so enjoy cashews in small amounts and watch out for the added salt if you are on a low sodium diet.

In herbal medicine, the bark of the plant can be scraped, then soaked and/or boiled to be used as an antidiarrheal. The seeds are ground into powders and used for antivenom for snake bites.

Anacardic and cardanol, by-products of the cashew nutshell liquid, have some uses in medicine and industry. The tissue between the double shell has been used medicinally for burning off warts. Cardanol is used in industry for the manufacture of surface coatings, insulating varnishes, laminating resins etc...

Chân Carroll