

Acacia, *n.* [Fr. from Gr. *akazo*, to sharpen—many of the species having thorns or prickles.] A very extensive genus of trees or shrubby plants, inhabiting the tropical parts of both the old and new world, and, in a very few instances only, extending into temperate latitudes. This genus belongs to the nat. ord. *Leguminosa*, or *Fabaceæ*. Some of the species produce catechu and gum-arabic. The bark of the others yields a large quantity of tannin, which, in the form of an extract, is annually imported from Van Diemen's Land in considerable quantity; the species from which this substance is produced are chiefly *Acacia decurrens* and *mollissima*. As objects of ornament, they are usually of striking beauty, and it may be doubted whether, in the whole vegetable kingdom, such a brilliant coloring, and elegant foliage, combined with a most graceful aspect, and are found united in the same individuals. *General character of the genus.* Flowers polygamous; calyx, with either 4 or 5 teeth; petals, either 4 or 5, sometimes distinct from each other, sometimes adhering in a monopetalous corolla; stamens varying in number from 10 to 200: pod, not separating into many joints; juiceless, two-valved. Some species have true leaves that are twice or thrice pinnate, with a multitude of minute, shining, or, at least, even leaflets; others have, in a perfect state, no leaves, properly so called, but, in their stead, the leaf-stalks enlarge, and assume the appearance, and no doubt also the functions, of true leaves. Nearly 300 species are known, and among the most remarkable are:—*Acacia catechu* (*Mimosa catechu*, Linn.), a tree found in mountainous places, principally in Bengal and Coromandel. Its unripe pods and wood yield, by decoction, one of the sorts of catechu of the shops. (See CATECHU.)—*Acacia Arabica*, the gum-arabic tree, an inhabitant of the East Indies, Arabia, and Abyssinia, where it forms a tree thirteen to fourteen feet high, of inelegant appearance. This is one of the plants that yield the useful substance called gum-arabic, which is produced by wounding the bark: after which the sap runs out, and hardens in transparent lumps. (See GUM.)—*Acacia pubescens*, downy acacia, a native of the east coast of New Holland, and one of the most beautiful of green-leaf plants. It produces a vast abundance of yellow blossoms, which weigh down the slender graceful branches, and perfume the air with a faint but pleasant odor.—*Acacia julibrissin*, the silk-tassel acacia, a native of Persia, and a small tree, remarkable by its light, airy foliage, and for the great beauty of its clusters of lilac flowers, the long and slender stamens of which stream in the wind, and glitter in the sun, like a number of silken tassels artificially fastened to the boughs. This species is commonly cultivated in temperate parts of Europe and America.—*Cultivation.*—Most of the species may be multiplied by cuttings stuck in silver sand, placed under a bell-glass, and kept in a warm place, to which no direct solar light has access. Others, and among them *Acacia julibrissin*, have the power of producing shoots from pieces of the root placed in earth in a hot-bed, and by these the nurserymen generally propagate them.

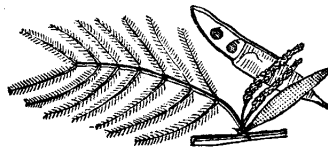


Fig. 14. — ACACIA CATECHU.