

# Kola Nut and Powder Profile

## Also known as

Cola acuminata.

## Introduction

Tropical Africa is the native home of the towering kola tree growing up to 40 feet (13 meters) tall. Its yellow flowers tinged with purple bear reddish-brown seeds about the size of a walnut with almost no taste but rich in caffeine. The Igbo, a tribe in southern Nigeria, consider the kola nut tree to be the first tree (and fruit) on earth. They consider the nut to be a symbol of hospitality, kindness and fraternity. Throughout Western Africa, a small piece of nut is chewed before each meal to promote digestion. It was introduced to Europe in the mid 16th century by Portuguese traders. The nut is also thought to improve the flavor of any food and to counteract the effects of drinking tainted water.

## Constituents

Caffeine, starch, sugar.

## Parts Used

The whole nut. The nuts, either whole or cut retain their caffeine content better than kola nut powder and it is recommended that you grind your Kola immediately before using.

## Typical Preparations

Kola, as its name suggests, is a main ingredient in many traditional colas. In herbal medicine, the nut is usually soaked in alcohol to make tinctures. May be taken as tea although bitter, and the powder can be taken as a capsule.

## Summary

Kola nut was used as the main ingredient in cola drinks for many years, but is now mainly used as a flavoring agent. Kola is a traditional energy tonic and antidepressant. In Western Uganda, kola nut is thought to enhance male potency. The nut may contain compounds effect against the trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness). The German E Commission considers it safe, and lists its uses for mental and physical fatigue.

## Precautions

Avoid if there is uncontrolled high blood pressure. Not to be used while pregnant. Excessive use may cause gastro-intestinal upset and it should not be used for long periods of time.

# Kola Nuts

**Botanical:** *Kola vera* (SCHUM.)

**Family:** N.O. Sterculiaceae

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---**Synonyms**---*Cola acuminata*. *Sterculia acuminata*. Kola Seeds. Gurru Nuts. Bissy Nuts. Cola Seeds. Guru Nut.

---**Part Used**---Seeds.

---**Habitat**---Sierra Leone, North Ashanti near the sources of the Nile; cultivated in tropical Western Africa, West Indies, Brazil, Java.

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---**Description**---This tree grows about 40 feet high, has yellow flowers, spotted with purple; leaves 6 to 8 inches long, pointed at both ends.

The seeds are extensively used as a condiment by the natives of Western and Central tropical Africa, also by the negroes of the West Indies and Brazil, who introduced the trees to these countries.

In Western Africa these trees are usually found growing near the sea-coast, and a big trade is carried on with the nuts by the natives of the interior- *Cola* being eaten by them as far as Fezzan and Tripoli. A small piece is chewed before each meal to promote digestion; it is also thought to improve the flavour of anything eaten after it and even to render putrid water palatable; the powder is applied to cuts.

There are several kinds of *Cola* seeds derived from different species, but the *Cola vera* are most generally used and preferred for medicinal purposes. Those from West Africa and West Indies supply the commercial drug. *C. acuminata*, or Gurru Nuts, are employed in the same way as *C. vera*; they are from a tree growing in Cameron and Congo, not esteemed so highly, but much in use as a caffeine stimulant; 600 tons are said to be sent yearly to Brazil for the negroes' use, who also employ the seeds of *S. Chica* and *S. Striata*. The Kola of commerce consists of the separated cotyledons of the kernel of the seed; when fresh it is nearly white, on drying it undergoes a fermentative change, turning reddish brown and losing much of its astringency. The dried cotyledons vary in size from 1 to 2 inches, are irregular in shape but roughly plano-convex, exterior reddy brown, interior paler, easily cut, showing a uniform section, odourless and almost tasteless. Large quantities of the fresh seeds are employed in Africa on account of their sustaining properties, where they form an important article of inland commerce.

---**Constituents**---The different varieties of nuts give a greater or lesser percentage of caffeine, which is only found in the fresh state. The seeds are said to contain a glucoside, Kolanin, but this substance appears to be a mixture of Kola red and caffeine. The seeds also contain starch, fatty matter, sugar, a fat decomposing enzyme acting on various oils.

---**Medicinal Action and Uses**---The properties of Kola are the same as caffeine, modified only by the astringents present. Fresh Kola Nuts have stimulant action apart from the caffeine content, but as they appear in European commerce, their action is indistinguishable from that of other caffeine drugs and Kola red is inert. Kola is also a valuable nervine, heart tonic, and a good general tonic.

---**Adulterations**---Male Kola (not to be confused with Kola) is the fruit of a small tree, *Garcinia Kola*, and contains no caffeine. The fruit is oblong, from 2 to 3 inches long and 1 inch broad; it is trigonal in section, reddish brown with nutmeg-like markings. Taste, bitter and astringent. Under microscope shows resinous masses, surrounded by cells full of starch. The seeds of *Lucuma Mammosa* are sometimes found mixed with Kola Nuts, but are easily detected by their strong smell of prussic acid. *Hertiera Litorales* seeds are also sometimes found mixed with Kola Nuts.

*C. Ballayi* (cornu) seeds are also used, but these are easily distinguished as the seeds have six cotyledons and contain little caffeine.

---**Preparations**---Fluid extract of Kola, 10 to 40 drops. Solid extract alc., 2 to 8 grains.