

Carob Tree – Harrub

The carob tree is a Maltese indigenous tree and a member of the legume (peas and beans) family which grows in Mediterranean areas. It is known to live for more than a thousand years. It is a large tree and grows up to 15m in 50 years but produces no fruit for the first 15 years of its life. This tree produces carob pods which start developing on the tree in



November and take till August to mature. Developing carob pods have the appearance of green broad beans but they turn a dark glossy brown when ripe. They are 10 to 20 cm long. The dark green glossy leaves, which it grows all year round, help the tree to survive during the dry summer months. Although the tree is evergreen it sheds leaves all year round, making the soil beneath it very fertile. The Carob tree spreads its roots in search of water.



Developing Carob pods



Ripe Carob pods

There are male and female carob trees, but only the female tree produces pods. However it is important that a male tree is in the vicinity for pollination to take place. During late summer and autumn, both male and female trees produce flowers, which are very different from each other. The male tree produces flowers which are full of pollen and emanates a very strong smell to attract insects. Once the insects come to the tree to take pollen and nectar, they will go to the female tree and cross pollination takes place. Only those female flowers which are pollinated will develop into carob pods.



Female flower



Male flower

The carob pod is used for many things. Once ripe the pod can be eaten by humans and a variety of animals. Carob is also a healthy alternative to chocolate as it is free from the stimulant caffeine found in chocolate. In Malta the carob pod is also used to make carob syrup which is good for coughs and to make 'Karamelli' a sweet sold on Good Friday.

Nothing is wasted from the pod as the seeds are also used. Seeds contain a gum which is extracted and used as a natural additive with many food products. In European Community legislation it has an "E" number of E410. It is used in a wide range of products, among the most important of which are ice cream, baby foods and pet foods. In ice cream the gum slows the rate of melt-down and improves its storage properties. Other food uses include the manufacture of soft cheeses, sausage products such as salami, bakery products, pie fillings, powdered desserts, sauces and salad creams, and dairy products.



Carob seeds



Carob syrup