

Jasminum polyanthum

Pink Jasmine, White Jasmine

多花素馨

Another treasure from China



China has proved to be an absolute treasure trove of flowering and fruiting plants. Pink Jasmine (*Jasminum polyanthum*), a fragrant, sturdy evergreen climber, is no exception. The flowers with their heady fragrance are manifestly exotic, and so too is the name, *Jasminum*, derived from the Persian 'yasameen', ('Gift of God'). Jasmine bears long trusses of pink buds which open to white flowers, thus the appropriate specific epithet, *polyanthum*, meaning *many flowers*. The Chinese name, 多花素馨 (duo hua su xin), means the same, *many flowered jasmine*. You may have tried Chinese *Jasmine Tea*, 茉莉花茶. This is a blend of either green, white or Oolong tea together

with flowers of the closely related *Jasminum sambac*.

As for the **chemistry**, jasmine gives its name to the important plant hormone, **methyl jasmonate**, which was first isolated from the jasmine oil of *Jasminum grandiflorum*. This led to a full characterisation of this **critical warning system in plant defence** and a new family of **signal molecules** that we call **jasmonates**.

The genus *Jasminum* is believed to have originated in southern Asia, and there are 200 species worldwide, mostly from subtropical and tropical regions of Asia, Africa and Australasia. There are a number of species of *Jasminum* native to



New South Wales. Pink Jasmine (*Jasminum polyanthum*) is a native of south-western China (Guizhou, Sichuan and Yunnan) and Myanmar, where it grows in forests and woodlands.

Now before you get carried away with this lovely climber, be warned. It is recorded as an invasive species in New Zealand and various states of Australia. Jasmine's potential as a weed seems to be that it grows vigorously even in low light and is relatively free of pests and diseases. Perhaps not surprising that Jasmine belongs to the plant family **Oleaceae**, which includes a number of other invasive, weedy plants, such as olives (*Olea europaea*), small and large leaved privet (*Ligustrum sinense*, *L. lucidum*) and some species of ash (e.g. *Fraxinus angustifolia* – Desert Ash). So if you live near bushland, consider planting a native climber rather than this potentially aggressive intruder.



Map modified from Encyclopedia of Life: <http://eol.org/pages/2899031/overview>

Illustration from *Flora of China*:: http://www.efloras.org/object_page.aspx?object_id=4535&flora_id=2

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