

Uncaria

~40 species. See text

Uncaria is a genus of flowering plants in the family Rubiaceae. It has about 40 species.[1] Their distribution is pantropical, with most species native to tropical Asia, three from Africa and the Mediterranean and two from the neotropics.[2] They are known colloquially as gambier, cat's claw or uña de gato. The latter two names are shared with several other plants. The type species for the genus is *Uncaria guianensis*. [3]

Indonesian Gambier (*U. gambir*) is a large tropical vine with leaves typical of the genus, being opposite and about 10 cm (3.9 in) long. The South American *U. tomentosa* is called Uña de Gato. *Uncaria sinensis* is common in China.

Uncaria was named in 1789 by Johann von Schreber in his *Genera Plantarum* edition 8[a] (not to be confused with books of the same title by Linnaeus, Jussieu, and others).[4][5] The genus name is derived from the Latin word *uncus*, meaning "a hook".[6] It refers to the hooks, formed from reduced branches, that *Uncaria* vines use to cling to other vegetation.

Uncaria is a member of the tribe Naucleae, but its position within that tribe remains unresolved.[7]

Woody lianas; climbing by hooks formed from reduced, modified branches. Stipules entire or bifid. Inflorescences are compact heads at the ends of horizontal, very reduced branches. Corolla lobes without appendages. Seeds with a long wing at each end, the lower wing deeply bifid.[8]

As of March 2023[update], Plants of the World Online accepted the following species:[9]

Diplomat Edmund Roberts noted that, upon his visit to China in the 1830s, Chinese were using *U. gambir* for tanning, and noted that the *U. gambir* made "leather porous and rotten." He also noted that Chinese would chew it with areca nut.[10] The plant extract contains some 150 identified phytochemicals, including catechins, proanthocyanins, and chalcone-flavan-3-ol dimers, called gambirins.[11][12] Cat's claw (*U. tomentosa*) and the Chinese *Uncaria* species are used in traditional medicine, although there is no high-quality clinical evidence they have any medicinal properties.[11]

Although cat's claw appears to be safe for human use below 350 milligrams per day over 6 weeks, its adverse effects may include nausea, diarrhea, upset stomach, and an increased risk of bleeding if used with an anticoagulant drug.[11]

