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Dark Side of The Family

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Binjai or *Mangifera caesia* is one of the lesser known species of wild mango native to Malaysia, Borneo and Sumatra that produces fruits of superior texture and excellent taste. However, care must be taken not to come into contact with the white-coloured juice of immature binjai fruits as it is an extreme irritant upon ingestion or contact with the skin; historical records indicate its use to cause both internal and external injury.

Binjai belongs to the family Anacardiaceae, a globally distributed plant family of above 850 species. Characteristic for the family is the production of a sap in their tissues that turns black on exposure to air and may cause, at times serious, skin irritations.

Among the more notorious members of the family are Rengas (especially *Gluta* spp.) and plants generally known as poison ivy (*Toxicodendron* spp.) and sumac (*Rhus* spp.). Their highly allergenic tissues, containing the volatile oil urushiol, are capable of causing severe allergies on slightest exposure to these compounds. A surprise to many, the popular snacks of cashew nut (*Anacardium occidentale*) and pistachio (*Pistaciavera*) are also members of the Anacardiaceae.

