



FIGURE 13.1 *Muntingia calabura* fruits.

and juicy, and contains a large number of tiny (0.5 mm) yellow seeds. This is a fast-growing fruit tree. It is a pioneer species that thrives in poor soil, able to tolerate acidic and alkaline conditions, as well as drought. It is cultivated for its edible fruit, and has become naturalized in some other parts of the tropics, including Southeastern Asia. As a pioneer plant, it could help condition the soil and make it habitable for other plants.

13.3 MEDICINAL VALUE

Traditional medicinal applications of the plant, although not recorded in extensive literature, include its use as an antiseptic to relieve headaches, gastric ulcers and inflammation of the prostate gland (Morton 1987; Zakaria et al. 2007). The extracts of the fruits are used as tranquilizers and tonics (Kaneda et al. 1991). The plant is used to treat measles, mouth pimples and stomachaches (Yasunaka et al. 2005). The fruit is also used to treat incipient cold, as a tranquilizer, as an antispasmodic and as an anti-dyspeptic.

13.4 PHYTOCHEMICAL INVESTIGATIONS

Increasing epidemiological studies have repeatedly revealed the role of consumption of fruits and vegetables in the prevention of degenerative and chronic diseases. The phytochemical properties of *M. calabura* are presented in Table 13.1. These benefits are thought to result from various bioactive components of plant origin, such as vitamins, flavonoids and carotenoids. High intake of fruits and vegetables has shown to