

Bay, Bay leaf, Laurel *Laurus Nobilis* Family: Lauraceae

Description

Bay is a potentially large evergreen tree, (up to 15m in height) with thick, shiny, leathery, lanceolate leaves and smooth grey bark. It produces a small pale cream flower in warm climates only, (such as Auckland), from a fragrant bud, and a blue-black berry.

Growing Tips

It likes full or partial sun and is comfortable in a pot where it will grow slowly. It needs rich, well-drained soil and left to prosper in open ground it can spread through shoots from the root, and grow into a tall wide-spread specimen. Bay is dioecious, meaning male and female flowers grow on separate plants.

Parts Used

Leaves

Uses

With their very strong woody aroma, similar to nutmeg, the leaves are used in sauces, soups and stews, mainly in Italian and French cuisine. The leaves are removed after cooking as they are too tough to eat. Dried and ground they can also be added in the same way. Ground bay is an ingredient to the famous drink "Bloody Mary".

Traditionally, the leaves were boiled in water and applied to rashes caused by poison ivy, poison oak and stinging nettle. Oil extracted from the leaves was used in massage for rheumatism and arthritis, and for ear ache and high blood pressure. Aleppo soap, known for its nourishing quality to the skin, has Bay oil as its main ingredient. Today their medicinal property is not sought after.

Origin & History

This plant, with some of its variations, formed the main vegetation in the ancient Laurisilva forests that existed around the Mediterranean basin before the climate dried and became harsher.

Bay is said to be tied to the sun god Apollo who carried a wreath of its leaves around his head in memory of unrequited love to a nymph who was turned into a Bay tree in order to avoid his affection.

A wreath of this plant was presented to the winners of the Pythian Games, an ancient Greek sports competition. The words 'baccalaureate' and 'poet laureate' stem from this plant's genus name and signify status in academic and literary fields.

In Chinese folklore the Laurel is a symbol for endless toil, similar to the story of Sisyphe

