

Did You Know?



Bay Laurel, *Laurus nobilis*

- *Laurus nobilis* is known as bay laurel, bay leaf tree, sweet bay, Grecian laurel, and true laurel, among other common names.
- Hardy to zone 8, the evergreen bay laurel tree can grow up to 60 feet in Mediterranean-type climates. It is grown in containers, planted as hedges and pruned into topiary standards in addition to being grown as house plants in colder areas.
- Since the bay laurel is dioecious (male and female on separate plants), small, pale yellow-green flowers followed by small, berry-like drupes appear on the female trees. As the one-seeded fruit matures it becomes purplish black.
- Culinary uses of bay leaf have existed since the ancient Greeks. It has also been used in cuisines around the world, including Mediterranean, American, French, Thai, Indian and Pakistani.
- Bay laurel is an ingredient in the French bouquet garni, massaman curry, garam masala and biryani rice, to name a few well known dishes and spice blends.
- Fresh bay leaves are less aromatic than dried leaves. Dried leaves have a sharp and slightly floral flavor resembling thyme and oregano.
- Bay leaves are removed from dishes prior to serving to prevent irritation of the digestive tract. Put fragments in a muslin bag or tea strainer for easy removal. No need to remove ground bay leaves.
- With a long history of medicinal uses, bay infusions have been used to treat digestive disorders, rashes, aches and pains.
- In Greek mythology, the nymph Daphne was turned into a laurel tree after fleeing from Apollo. In his despair, Apollo used the leaves of the noble laurel to honor athletes winning the Pythian Games. Romans made laurel crowns to symbolize victory.
- Poet laureate, bacalaureate and the saying “resting on one’s laurels” originated from the symbolism associated with bay laurel. Wreathes of laurel can be seen on Roman pottery, statuary and mosaics.
- In another tradition from Europe and Britain, young girls placed a small bouquet of bay leaves under their pillows on the eve of St. Valentine’s Day so they’d dream of their future husbands.
- Do not confuse *Laurus nobilis* with mountain laurel, (*Kalmia latifolia*), which has poisonous leaves, or West Indian bay (*Pimenta racemosa*) used to produce bay rum for hair or bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*), grown as an ornamental shrub with aromatic leaves and fruit used to make candles.

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