

Bay Laurel (*Laurus nobilis*):

Sun, Fire. The leaves can be burned or chewed to induce visions. Worn as an amulet to ward off negativity and evil. Leaves under the pillow are supposed to induce prophetic dreams. Can be used in protection and purification rituals. Growing near a house, it was supposed to protect those within from infection and storms. Z. Budapest gives a spell using bay laurel for use in games of chance: take three laurel leaves and three pieces of parchment. Write on each paper the names of the Triple Goddess: Diana, Isis, Hecate. Keep the leaves and parchment in a red flannel bag in your pocket, and before starting your game of chance say: 'Isis of the Thousand Breasts, make my chance the best one yet'.

Bay Leaf Profile

Also known as

Laurus nobilis. Identified in specialty cookbooks as sweet laurel, dafni (Greek), lager (Swedish), Laurb*r (Danish), laurier (Dutch), lauro (Italian), lavr (Russian), yue gui (Mandairin), and yuht gwai (Cantonese).

Introduction

The leaf of the bay laurel, a native shrub of the lands surrounding the northern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, has a mythic history. Ancient mythology recounts that Apollo pursued the uninterested nymph Daphne. Apollo stalked Daphne until the gods granted her protection by turning her into a bay tree. In the Greek language, the herb is still called "dafni." At the Temple of Delphi, which is dedicated to Apollo, the priestesses would eat bay leaves before diving the future. Because bay leaves are mildly narcotic, this may have helped induce the trance state. Even the roof of the temple was thatched bay leaves. This roofing not only served as a sunscreen, but protection from lightning, disease, and evil spirits. Romans considered the bay tree the best protection from thunderstorms, and Nero believed that bay trees purified "vapors" thought to cause disease. As recently as the beginnings of the American era, superstition held that when bay trees died, disaster followed. The greatest commercial production of bay leaf today is in Turkey. Bay laurels do not withstand heavy frost but require hot, dry summers for production of concentrated essential oils. In the US, the plant is best suited to interior southern California, although smaller specimens can survive as far north as Oregon. The bay leaf from California is oilier and more pungent than Turkish bay leaf.

Constituents

Mostly 1,8-cineol, with smaller amounts of alpha- and beta-pinene, phellandrene, linalool, geraniol and terpineol.

Parts Used

Dried leaf whole or broken

Typical Preparations

Whole or crumbled added to cooking, or consumed as a tea. Bay leaf comes together with parsley and thyme resulting in the subtle yet flavorful blend known as Bouquet Garni, and enhances the taste of any stew, soup or sauce it is introduced into. It is an important ingredient in many French, Moroccan and Turkish dishes.

Summary

Culpepper's Complete Herbal recommended bay leaf oil for pimples and "all manner of griefs and pain proceeding from wind." A more modern medical application of the herb would be increasing insulin sensitivity, lowering blood sugars, and retarding weight gain, used as one of many similar herbs, including cinnamon, cloves, and turmeric. The Greeks and Romans crowned victors with wreaths of laurel. The term baccalaureate means laurel berry, and refers to the ancient practice of honoring scholars and poets with garlands from the bay laurel tree. Ever since humans have been using bay leaves, they have been associated with good luck, and warding off evil.

Precautions

None.

Botanical: *Laurus nobilis* (LINN.)

Family: N.O. Lauraceae

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---**Synonyms**---Sweet Bay. True Laurel. Bay. Laurier d'Apollon. Roman Laurel. Noble Laurel. Lorbeer. Laurier Sauce. Daphne.

---**Parts Used**---Leaves, fruit, oil.

---**Habitat**---Shores of the Mediterranean.

---**Description**---The Sweet Bay is a small tree, growing in Britain to a height of about 25 feet, but in warmer climates reaching as much as 60 feet. The smooth bark may be olive-green or of a reddish hue. The luxurious, evergreen leaves are alternate, with short stalks, lanceolate, 3 to 4 inches long, the margin smooth and wavy. They are thick, smooth, and of a shining, dark green colour. The flowers are small, yellow and unisexual, and grow in small clusters. The shrub has been cultivated in Britain since the sixteenth century. It is the source of the ancients' crowns and wreaths for heroes and poets, and the

modern term of 'bachelor,' given for degrees, is probably derived from *bacca-laureus*, or laurel-berry, through the French *bachelier*.

The Delphic priestesses are said to have made use of the leaves. It grows well under the shade of other trees if they are not too close, and is useful in evergreen plantations. The leaves are much used in cookery for flavouring. They are often packed with stick liquorice or dried figs. They are used fresh, and may be gathered all the year round.

The volatile oil is sometimes used in perfumery.

The dried, black, aromatic *berries* come from Provence, Spain, Italy and Morocco. They are ovoid, and the kernel of the seed is loose.

The *wood* is sweet-scented, and is used for marqueterie work.

Onguent de Laurier is prepared from the oil with axonge and the colouring and scenting principles of the leaves and fruit.

---**Constituents**---A greenish-yellow volatile oil is yielded by distillation from the leaves which contains a high percentage of oxygenated compounds. The berries contain both fixed and volatile oils, the former, known as *Oil of Bays*, includes *laurostearine*, the ether of lauric acid. *Laurin* can be extracted by alcohol.

A frequent substitute for the expressed oil is said to be lard-coloured with chlorophyll or indigo and turmeric, scented with the berries. Boiling alcohol, which dissolves the true oil, will detect this.

The volatile oil contains pinene, geraniol, eugenol, cineol, etc.

---**Medicinal Action and Uses**---Leaves, berries and oil have excitant and narcotic properties. The leaves are also regarded as a diaphoretic and in large doses as an emetic.

Except as a stimulant in veterinary practice the leaves and fruit are very rarely used internally. They were formerly employed in hysteria, amenorrhoea, flatulent colic, etc. The berries have been used to promote abortion.

Oil of Bays is used externally for sprains, bruises, etc., and sometimes dropped into the ears to relieve pain. The leaves were formerly infused and taken as tea, and the powder or infusion of the berries was taken to remove obstructions, to create appetite, or as an emmenagogue. Four or five moderate doses were said to cure the ague. The berries were formerly used in several French carminative preparations.

The following products are often mistaken for those of *Laurus nobilis*.

The fruits of Cocculus Indicus or Anamirta paniculata. They are odourless and kidneyshaped.

The oil of Pimenta Acris, from which *bay rum* is distilled in the West Indies, and which is also called oil of bay.

The leaves of Prunus Laurocerasus, or Cherry Laurel, to which the name of Laurel is now always applied. The margin of these short, strong serrations at intervals. Caution should be observed in distinguishing these, owing to their poisonous properties.