

Myrtle Leaf Profile

Also known as

Myrtus communis, true myrtle, common myrtle, sweet myrtle, Greek myrtle

Introduction

Myrtle is found throughout the Mediterranean, as well as in some tropical and sub-tropical regions. It is an evergreen shrub or small tree with star-like flowers that have an exceedingly large amount of stamens and blue-black berries. The flowers bloom in summer, and the berries ripen in fall and early winter. Myrtle was one of the symbols of the Three Graces, and a Victorian symbol of fidelity in marriage. Nymphs are often associated with the myrtle tree. One story relates that it was nymphs of the myrtle tree that gave humanity the arts of making cheese, bee keeping, and growing olives. Another relates how the nymph Daphne turned herself into a myrtle tree to escape being raped by Apollo. This could explain why the myrtle leaf is considered a symbol of protection.

Parts Used

The leaves are used predominantly, but the whole plant can be utilized for different applications involving myrtle's pleasant scent.

Typical Preparations

The leaves can be used as a tea, as well as cooking and grilling meats and vegetables. Used as firewood, it transmits a spicy aromatic flavor to whatever it is grilled over. The berries are edible but seldom eaten as they are quite bitter. The berries have been processed into jam, and at times been used as a substitute for black pepper. All parts of the plant can be used for a myriad of fragrant pursuits.

Summary

Myrtle was considered sacred to both Aphrodite and Demeter. In pagan and wiccan rituals it is associated with and sacred to Beltane (Mayday). In Jewish liturgy it is one of the four sacred plants of Sukkot, the Feast of the Tabernacles. On the islands of Sardinia and Corsica it is used to produce a liqueur called Mirto. Historically it has been taken internally for urinary infections, digestive problems, bronchial congestion, and dry coughs. In India it is seen as a treatment for cerebral infections, most notably epilepsy. It has also been used at various times as an astringent, an antiseptic and a decongestant.

Precautions

There is little documented evidence to show that Myrtle is particularly dangerous, but caution should always be maintained when trying any new botanical. It is recommended that pregnant women should avoid myrtle

