

Flora & Fauna in Spain

Bay Laurel

The Bay Laurel (*Laurus nobilis*, Lauraceae), also known as True Laurel, Sweet Bay, Laurel Tree, Grecian Laurel, Laurel, or Bay Tree, is an aromatic evergreen tree or large shrub reaching 10-18 m tall, native to the Mediterranean region.

The leaves are 6-12 cm long with a characteristic finely serrated and wrinkled margin. It is dioecious, meaning male and female flowers on separate plants. Each flower is pale yellow-green, about 1 cm diameter. The fruit is a small black berry about 1 cm long, containing a single seed.

The aromatic bay leaves are commonly used in cooking in many countries of Europe to flavour stews, soups, meat and fish dishes.

It is also one of the ingredients used in a bouquet garni. The older darker leaves are the best to use as the flavour is more intense.

A greenish-yellow volatile oil is yielded by distilling from the leaves which contains a high percentage of oxygenated compounds and often used in perfumery. The wood is sweet-scented, and is used for marquetry work.

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.

