

The Laurel (*Laurus nobilis*), also known as **True Laurel, Sweet Bay, Laurel Tree, Grecian Laurel**, or **Bay Tree**, belongs to the family *Lauraceae*. It is an aromatic, evergreen, dioecious shrub or small tree, native to the Mediterranean region.

The generic name *Laurus* is the corresponding Latin name for laurel; the specific name, *nobilis*, is a Latin word given to the plant because it was considered as the noble's plant (*Laurel noble*).

DESCRIPTION

An evergreen, dioecious shrub or small tree, up to 12 m high, with a dense crown. It has dull grey-brown branches and green, glabrous young shoots. Leaves are alternate, simple, coriaceous, broadly lanceolate, elliptic or ovate, 4 - 10 x 1.5 - 6cm, acute, dark green, pleasantly aromatic when crushed. Flowers are actinomorphic, unisexual, in dense clusters. It flowers from February to April. Fruit a shining black, one-seeded berry, ripening from September to October.



DISTRIBUTION- HABITAT

Laurel is indigenous to Cyprus, occurring on moist ground, usually near streams and springs. It is locally common mainly along streams, all over the Troodos range but also on Pentadaktylos (30 - 1300m altitude). It is found mostly as individual or scattered, but occasionally it forms small thickets.

It is one of the most popular ornamental, indigenous species, used mainly as a hedge plant but also for landscaping purposes in gardens. It is naturally grown or artificially cultivated all over the island; it is propagated easily by seed, cuttings or suckers. It does well on various types of soil, preferring however rich, moist and well drained soils. It is quite resistant to drought, low temperatures and sea spray and thus it can be cultivated in coastal regions. The dense foliage and relatively large crown makes it an ideal refuge to many smaller plant and animal species. A large number of Cyprus fauna species, especially birds, feed on laurel's fruits.



PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT

It is the dominant plant of the priority habitat type 5230* (*Arborescent mattoral with Laurus nobilis*) of the Directive of Habitats 92/43/EEC, that occurs very rarely in Cyprus. Most of its stands found on the island have been included in the Natura 2000 network. Cyprus has the obligation to take all administrative and management measures necessary to maintain



this natural habitat in favorable conservation status, especially because it is a priority habitat type, meaning it is threatened at European level.

A monumental, century - old tree of Laurel, grows near Omodos village of Lemesos district, close to the old church of Apostle Philippos; the church is thought to have been built about 1000 years ago. According to certain archaeological findings in the area (plates with signs), a temple of God Apollo existed on the site. Local people believe the Laurel was dedicated to God Apollo.

The tree has been declared as protected since 30.1.2004 after an Order by the Minister of Interior. The tree is regularly checked and tended by the Forestry Department.

The cutting of a laurel tree with a stem diameter at breast height (1.30 m) more than 15 cm is prohibited by the Forest Law, unless a felling license is issued by the Department of Forests.

HISTORICAL ELEMENTS

Daphne, daughter of the river-god Ladon, was a nymph loved by God Apollo. She was a beautiful, shy young girl and, when Apollo's desire became too pressing, she fled to her mother Gaea who turned her into a laurel tree. Since that time, the laurel became sacred to Apollo, who used it for purification because of its strong aromatic scent. According to a legend when Apollo killed the dragon Python, he washed his hands and body in the valley of Tempe, where laurels grow abundantly until today. Then, crowned with branches of laurel, he triumphantly entered Delphi. Laurel later became a symbol of respect, victory and fame, hence the term laureate. Laurel boughs according to some indications were used for the construction of the oldest sanctuary of Apollo (Pausanias 10.5.9).

TRADITIONAL USES



In the Bible, the laurel is often presented as an emblem of prosperity and fame. In Christianity, it symbolizes the Resurrection of Christ and the triumph of Humanity thereby.

Laurel wreaths are honourably placed to heroes and those offering important services to the State.

The medical properties of laurel leaves are mentioned by Dioskouridis (De material medica 1.160). In cookery, dried leaves of laurel are used for seasoning and food

conservation while the fragrant laurin oil extracted from the leaves is still in use in perfumes, candles and soaps.

In landscaping, laurel is a plant that gives easy and impressive solutions because of its dense foliage and because it can tolerate drought relatively well. Laurel is an excellent

shrub for hedges and a favorite for topiary sculpture because it responds very well to pruning.

It is as an ideal plant for hedges and natural sound barriers. It is widely used in the near churches and historical and archaeological sites while in recent years it is grown in large containers for indoor decoration.

Laurel plants can be acquired from the Forestry Department's nurseries but also from private nurseries as well.

Plinius mentions the decorative values of laurel: "The laurel is specifically dedicated to the triumphs, but is exceptionally decorative for houses, guarding the entrance of emperors and high-grade priests, while alone adorns the mansions remaining as a guard to their entries." (Natural History, 15.127).

FINAL COMMENTS

Laurel is a genuine Mediterranean plant, indigenous to Cyprus, connected to our tradition, fables and history. It has innumerable uses in pharmaceutical, perfumery and cooking while simultaneously it provides food and shelter to birds.

It is a plant that should not be absent from any Cypriot garden either as a hedge or as an individual plant.



Printed on recycled paper



P.I.O. /2010-5.000

Published by the Press and Information Office

Printed by the Government Printing Office

TREE OF THE YEAR 2011

Laurel

(Laurus nobilis L.)



MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT
DEPARTMENT OF FORESTS
www.moa.gov.cy/forest