

## Laurus nobilis – The Bay Tree

Commonly known as the Bay Tree or Bay Laurel, is a pyramidal tree or large shrub with aromatic, evergreen leaves and shiny grey bark that is found naturally in the southern Mediterranean region.

It can reach from 10 to 18m in height in its native range, but generally only grows from 2 to 3m tall in cultivation.

The leaves are elliptic, 5 to 10cm long, rather thick and leathery, and shiny dark green. In the Spring it produces clusters of small yellow flowers. This tree has male and female trees and flowers on the female are followed by 1.5cm black or purple berries.

The *Laurus nobilis* leaf is the source of the cooking herb bay leaf and bay leaf powder.

*Laurus nobilis* is best in well-drained soil in partial shade. It takes pruning well and makes a great shrub for hedges and is a favourite for topiary sculpture. It can be trained as a standard or allowed to grow as a spreading shrub. In cooler regions, grow in a container and bring indoors in winter.

Gather Bay Laurel nuts in late Autumn after the husks begin to shrivel and turn brown at the tips. Score around the husks with a utility knife and peel them apart to extract the large, nut-like seed.

### Propagation

Rub the end of each bay laurel seed with a fine-grain rasp to weaken the shell, which is a process called scarification. Apply gentle pressure when scarifying the seed and rub only until the shell thins slightly. Do not rub all the way through the shell.

Prepare a container for each bay laurel seed. Fill 20cm pots with a moistened mixture of three parts loam, two parts coarse sand and one part perlite and leave the top 1.5cm of each container empty. Sow the seeds at a 0.5cm depth.

Place each container inside a large, sealable clear plastic bag. Store the containers inside a refrigerator or outdoors under deep, heavy shade where temperatures stay around 0 - 4°C. Chill the seeds for two to three months.

Maintain light moisture in the loam mixture during the cold stratification period. Let the top 1.5cm dry out before adding more water, but do not let the mixture dry out completely, because the Bay Laurel seed will go dormant.

Move the containers to a sunny or lightly shaded area and remove the plastic bag once the chilling period ends. Shield them from direct sun and wind. Continue to water whenever the top 1.5cm of the loam mixture dries out. Germination at a minimum of 20-22°C.

Grow the Bay Laurel seedlings under dappled shade with regular watering during their first Summer. Transplant them into the ground six to eight weeks before the average date of the first Autumn frost.