

Laurus nobilis L.

Bay Laurel

(*Laurus angustifolia*, *Laurus aurea*, *Laurus officinale*, *Laurus undulata*)

Other Common Names: Bay, Bay Tree, Cooking Bay, Laurel, Grecian Laurel, Greek Laurel, Sweet Bay, True Laurel.

Family: *Lauraceae*.

Cold Hardiness: Useful in USDA zones 9(8b) to 11.

Foliage: Evergreen; alternate; simple; elliptic-ovate to elliptic-lanceolate; 20 to 40 long; glabrous; emerging light green and maturing to a dark glossy olive-green color above, a shade lighter beneath; the leaves are thick, tough, and leathery in texture; tips acute to acuminate; margins entire to undulate; base acute to cuneate, venation pinnate with the main veins yellowish above and slightly raised beneath; the petiole is short, $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ long, stout, nearly winged in appearance from above, with the surface rough in texture, and green to red-brown in color; leaves are distinctively aromatic, bay scented, when crushed.

Flower: Mostly dioecious; individual flowers are small with white petals and males with yellow stamens lending an overall creamy white to yellow-white color to the flower clusters; the flowers are hidden in the foliage and are generally inconspicuous.

Fruit: Fruits are roundish black berries approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ in diameter which mature in fall; they are not particularly ornamental.

Stem / Bark: Stems — medium to stout; stems are bright green and remain so for an extended time, eventually becoming splotched with gray and maturing to a gray-brown color; angled at first and then round; glabrous; there is strong apical dominance on vigorous stems; Buds — divergent; pointed to conical; prominently stalked; initially green, then maturing to a light to medium brown; Bark — gray to gray-brown.

Habit: In our regional landscapes, *L. nobilis* is an upright oval to rounded large shrub or small tree with multiple trunks, reaching 10 to 15 (20) tall; in its native land it can reach 40 or more; plants are strongly upright in youth, with the dense canopy becoming more rounded at maturity; the lower limbs tend to be retained allowing the tree to remain dense in the lower canopy; once established, trees may sucker to form colonies; the overall texture is medium-coarse to coarse.

Cultural Requirements: Although slow to moderately slow growing, this species is not difficult to cultivate; cold hardiness and intolerance to poorly drained soils are the primary cultural concerns; it grows best in full sun with afternoon shade, but will tolerate full to partial sun and is tolerant of heat and at least some soil salts; although plants survive moderate drought, when drought stressed the leaves tend to develop marginal necrosis; this species performs best on acidic soils and will develop chlorosis on the new leaves in high pH sites.

Pathological Problems: Scale infestations can be severe and are accompanied by sooty mold that often disfigures the foliage; root rots can be problematic on wet sites.

Ornamental Assets: The primary landscape asset of this species is its handsome dark glossy evergreen foliage; the flowers are mildly attractive upon close inspection and the foliage is aromatic if crushed.

Limitations & Liabilities: The species is rather slow growing and subject to severe scale infestations.

Landscape Utilization: Bay Laurel is a classic staple of the herb or cottage garden, but is also versatile enough to serve as a patio container plant, large evergreen screen, or large topiary; it is excellent for Mediterranean or heritage, educational, or historical gardens.

Other Comments: This is the classic laurel tree of antiquity; the branches were traditionally woven into garlands and wreaths to honor an accomplishment or victory; laurel crowns adorned ancient

Greek and Roman generals and athletes in victory parades; *Laurus nobilis* is also important as a culinary herb (bay) and an oil is extracted from it for use in perfumery and medicines.

Native Habitat: Mediterranean region, widely cultivated elsewhere in warm temperate regions.

Related Taxa: A number of cultivars are limitedly available in the trade; most are selections made based on leaf shape or growth habit; 'Angustifolia' (Willow-Leaf Bay) and 'Salicifolia' are selections with much narrower leaves than the species type; the cultivar 'Aurea' simply looks chlorotic in our region, perhaps it performs better in milder climates; *Laurus nobilis* is very closely related to the Camphor Tree (*Cinnamomum camphora*) which is a shade tree that is also grown in southern portions of our region.

Persea americana (L.) P. Miller

Avocado

(*Persea gratissima*, *Persea persea*)

- C Also known as Alligator Pear, Aguacate, Anakoya-Pallam, Buah Mentega, Et-Pera, or Soldier's Butter, Avocado is a staple fruit crop in subtropical and tropical climates; although native to tropical America, it is widely cultivated elsewhere; the common name of Avocado for this small to medium size evergreen tree derives from its Aztec name Ahuacatl; the fruit is egg to pear-shaped with a leathery green to brown skin that may be smooth to bumpy in texture; inside the skin is a yellow-green to green pulp that surrounds the fleshy seed; this highly nutritious edible pulp is about the consistency of a thick butter and is heavily utilized in Mexican and Tex-Mex cuisine; trees may require five to seven years to flower from seed, so budding of cultivars is practiced to ensure fruit quality and speed the time to production.
- C Avocado is cold hardy only in subtropical regions, USDA zones 10(9b) to 11; although only encountered in our region in very protected landscape sites along the Gulf Coast or lower Rio Grande Valley, it is sometimes grown as a conservatory or patio plant in cooler climates.

Persea borbonia (L.) K. Sprengel

Red Bay

(*Persea carolinensis*, *Persea littoralis*, *Tamala borbonia*)

- C Also known as Laurel Tree, Redbay Persea, Silk Bay, or Sweet Bay; Red Bay is a small to medium size evergreen tree is native to the Southeastern US, including portions of East and Southcentral Texas; the canopy typically consists of multiple trunks forming an upright oval crown; the foliage is aromatic if crushed, and is reported to serve as a substitute for *L. nobilis* as a culinary herb; the leaves are simple and vary from broadly to narrowly elliptic in shape; most are 30 to 50 in length with a long acuminate tip; overall the foliage texture is moderately coarse.
- C This moderate to slow growing tree is usually encountered as a denizen of sunny to partly sunny locations with sandy soils; the tree is not particularly drought tolerant and tends to occur on moist, but well drained sites.
- C Although a regional native and hardy to USDA zones 8 to 9, this species is seldom encountered in the trade or cultivated landscapes due to some severe foliar problems, particularly foliar galls and leaf spot diseases; preserve good in situ specimens if present on a site, but there are better trees for planting projects; perhaps it is suitable for naturalizing or wildlife plantings.
- C Some authorities consider *Persea borbonia* (L.) K. Sprengel var. *pubescens* (F. Pursh) C. Sargent (Swamp Bay, Swamp Red Bay, Swamp Sweet Bay) to be a separate species (*Persea palustris*, *Persea pubescens*, *Tamala pubescens*), whereas others simply relegate it to varietal status; it is somewhat smaller than the species type, has more pubescence on the new growth, and is often associated with wetter sites than the species type.

References: Adams, 1979; Barlow et al., 1991; Dirr, 2002; Halfacer and Shawcroft, 1979; Loeb and Carpenter, 1992; Nixon, 1985; Odenwald and Turner, 1996; Simpson, 1988; Welch and Grant, 1995.

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