**Laurus nobilis** L.  
*(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; 2 to 4 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, ¼ to ½ 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 ½ 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 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**

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.

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**

Also known as Laurel Tree, Redbay Persea, Silk Bay, or SweetBay; 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 3 to 5 in length with a long acuminate tip; overall the foliage texture is moderately coarse.

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.

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.

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.

Copyrighted 2004 with all rights reserved by Michael A. Arnold; intended for publication in Landscape Plants For Texas and Environ, Third Edition.