

*Aegle marmelos*

[Synonyms : *Belou marmelos*, *Crataeva marmelos*, *Crateva marmelos*, *Cydonia indica*, *Feronia pellucida*]

**BAEL** is a deciduous tree. Native to India and Burma (often referred to today as Myanmar) it has small sweet-scented, greenish-white flowers with many greenish-yellow stamens. It is also known as *Aegle* (French), Bael fruit, *Baelada mara* (Kannada), *Baeli* (Singhalese), Bael tree, *Bah hindi shull* (Persian), *Bau nau* (Vietnamese), Bel (Assamese, Bengali, English, Gujarati, Hindi, Malay, Marathi, Nepalese, Urdu), *Bela* (Spanish), *Belapatra* (Nepalese), *Belbaum* (German), Belfruit tree, *Belgiri* (Hindi, Urdu), *Be li* (Singhalese), *Beli* (Hindi), *Bel indien* (French), *Bel kham* (Urdu), *Belo* (Oriya), *Belpatra* (Kannada, Nepalese), *Bengálibirs* (Hungarian), *Bengalische Quitte* (German), Bengal quince, *Berunoki* (Japanese), *Bila* (Malay), *Bilak* (Malay), *Bilan* (Hindi), *Bilin* (Hindi), *Bili* (Gujarati), *Bilpatre* (Kannada), *Bilva* (Kannada, Sanskrit, Telugu), *Bilva pandu* (Telugu), *Bilwa* (Sanskrit), *Bnau* (Khmer), *Cognassier du Bengal* (French), *Coing de l'Inde* (French), *Cotogno del Bengala* (Italian), *Cotogno d'India* (Italian), Elephant apple, Golden apple, *Hind ayva agh* (Turkish), Holy fruit tree, *Igure marumerozu* (Japanese), Indian bael, Indian bael fruit, Indian quince, *Indische Quitte* (German), Japanese bitter orange, *Kapitthaphalamu* (Telugu), *Kawista* (Javanese), *Klejowiec jadalny* (Polish), *Kuuviram* (Tamil), *Maaredu* (Telugu), *Maaredy* (Malayalam), *Maja* (Indonesian), *Maja batuh* (Indonesian), *Maja pahit* (Indonesian), *Mapin* (Thai), Maredoo (English, Telugu), *Maredu* (Telugu), *Marmeleiro de India* (Portuguese), *Marmelos de Bengala* (Portuguese), *Ma-tum* (Thai), *Milva* (Spanish), *Modjo* (Javanese), *Mu ju* (Chinese), *Ohshit* (Burmese), *Opesheet* (Burmese), *Oranger de Malabar* (French), *Phneou* (Khmer), *Pnoi* (Khmer), Quince apple of India, *Safargal hindî* (Arabic), *Safarjal e hindî* (Arabic), *Shil* (Hindi), *Shriphal* (Hindi), *Shivadrumaa* (Sanskrit), *Shivaphala* (Sanskrit), *Shul* (Hindi), *Shull* (Arabic), *Siphal* (Hindi), Siriphal, *Sirphal* (Hindi), *Toum* (Laotian), *Tráimam* (Vietnamese), *Vel* (Marathi), *Velagapandu* (Telugu), *Vilva* (Hindi, Sanskrit), *Vilvam* (Sanskrit, Tamil), *Vilvama* (Tamil), *Vilva marum* (Tamil), *Wilau* (Hindi), *Willaw* (Hindi), Wood apple, and *Yin du gou qi* (Chinese).

The flowers are distilled to give scented water and an essential oil is also extracted from them. The fruit rind is distilled to yield an essential oil too. The oil is known as Marmelle oil. Transparent gum is extracted from the bark.

Bael is one of the trees that is sacred in Hinduism to Siva, the destroyer and producer. (One story tells how Parvati found she needed two lotuses for her offering to Siva and cut off her breasts as an alternative – and the fruit of bael emerged from them.) Its leaves are used in temple offerings to deities. A Hindu could never fell a bael tree but his death under one would bestow immediate salvation.

The leaves have been used as a seasoning for food on the now Indonesian island of Java (although they are not eaten whole as they are not only believed to cause sterility in women but abortion too). Leaves and twigs also offer livestock fodder.

Bael's sweetly-fragrant flowers are picked for making scented water. Their essential oil is used for for perfumes and in Thailand it also provides the scent in some hair oil.

When just ripe the woody, greyish-yellow fruit are used to make a nutritious sherbet and also

provide an ingredient to flavour other drinks. The edible, light reddish-orange ripe pulp with its mildly sweet-taste (apparently reminiscent of marmalade) is valued locally as a tonic – with a slightly laxative effect.

When half-ripe the fruit are preserved as a marmalade or pickle.

When completely unripe the fruit are harvested in Thailand to obtain a yellow dye from the skin for colouring silk, and this same dye has been used in India for calico printing. The fruit pulp has also provided a varnish – and a soap for washing clothes too and some authorities also believe the pulp can enhance watercolour paints. It is noted as well that unripe fruit are sliced and dried or powdered for sale in the bazaars for medicinal use.

A transparent gum which exudes from parts of the tree is extracted from the bark and offers an adhesive. Records show that it has been used as a glue by Sri Lankan jewellers. This same material can be found in the gummy fruit pulp, especially when it is unripe. Thus in addition to the pulp's wide range of uses already mentioned, it has also been mixed with lime and used for cementing the walls of water wells.

Locally the twigs are chewed, and they have also been used as toothbrushes.

Some records suggest that the smooth and lustrous, aromatic greyish-white or light yellow wood has been used for building houses and for making a range of products from carts and agricultural tools to combs, and oil and sugar mills.. Yet others state that the wood is only suitable for turning, as it is generally considered to be unsuitable for larger objects because it warps, twists and cracks. Whatever is correct this wood does yield a charcoal which has been used in gas production.

Medicinally, in south-eastern Asia, boiled, semi-ripe fruit are used as a recognized remedy for diarrhoea, cholera and dysentery. Fruit flesh is employed in the treatment of piles, and a decoction of the leaves is prescribed to treat sore eyes. The root and bark have also been appreciated locally as a remedy for fever.