

*Bauhinia*

*Leguminosae*

[*Caesalpiniaceae/Fabaceae*]

*Bauhinia* commemorates the Swiss Bauhin brothers. The prominently two-lobed leaves of most of the species in this genus are understood to have led the celebrated Swedish naturalist and physician Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778) to name these plants after them. Both were physicians and botanists held in high esteem for their individual contributions to the botanical world.

The eldest Jean or Johann Bauhin (1541-1613), after studying under the German botanist, Leonhard Fuchs (1501-1566), accompanied Conrad Gesner (1516-1565), the Swiss naturalist and physician by whom he is also said to have been much influenced, on a trip in the Alps. He then established a medical practice in Basle, became professor of Rhetoric there in 1566, but moved in 1570 to become physician to Duke Frederick I (a post he held until his death in 1613). Some authorities also note that he established, under patronage, two botanical gardens. He had only completed three of a 12-volume work *Historia plantarum universalis* before he died. The three volumes, containing about 5000 accurate descriptions of plants from Europe, the Far East and the New World, were published after his death and were a respected reference for 50-100 years.

His younger brother Caspar or Gaspard (1560-1624), after studying at several European schools and universities, eventually became professor of anatomy and botany at Basle, with subsequent appointments including rector of the university, and city physician. His published works included a medical textbook *Theatrum Anatomicum infinitis locis auctum*, and a comprehensive catalogue of 17<sup>th</sup> Century plants (names and synonyms) *Pinax Theatri Botanici, seu Index in Theophrasti, Dioscoridis, Plinii, et botanicorum qui a seculo scripserunt* both of which drew on his work on anatomical nomenclature and plant classification respectively. The latter is said to have been used by the Swedish botanist, Carolus Linnaeus.

Members of this family absorb nitrogen from the air. Through the bacterial nodules on their deep growing roots, they will introduce nitrogen to the soil (and aerate it) to the benefit of neighbouring plants and any following them in the same soil.