

Bauhinia variegata

[Synonyms : *Bauhinia alba*, *Bauhinia aurita*, *Bauhinia purpurea*, *Phanera variegata*]

ORCHID TREE is a deciduous tree. Native to India and China, it has rosy-purple to yellowish-white flowers which are strongly dark purple-veined on a central petal. It is also known as *Atamtti* (Marathi), *Ban* (Vietnamese), *Bauhinie panachée* (French), *Bois de boeuf* (Seychellois), *Bondanta* (Telugu), Buddhist bauhinia, Bull-hoof, *Bwechin* (Burmese), Camel's foot tree, *Deux jumelles* (French), *Devakanchan* (Bengali), Ebony wood, Geranium tree, *Gulabi kachnar* (Hindi), *Kachnal* (Urdu), *Kalavilaichi* (Tamil), *Kanchanar* (Gujarati), *Kovidara* (Sanskrit), *Mandara* (Telugu), Mountain ebony, Napoleon's hat, *Palo de Orquídeas* (Spanish), Poor man's orchid, Purple bauhinia, Purple orchid tree, *Rakta-kanchan* (Bengali and Marathi), *Sabot boeuf* (Seychellois), *Suvarnamandaram* (Malayalam), *Taki* (Nepalese), Variegated bauhinia, Variegated mountain ebony, and *Vlinderbloem* (Dutch).

The vanilla scented flowers are pollinated by bees. The bean-like fruit pods explode when ripe to scatter their brown seeds.

The bark yields a sticky gum.

Orchid tree is similar in appearance to purple bauhinia (*Bauhinia purpurea*).

Warning – the underground root bark is poisonous.

Variegata means 'variegated or irregularly coloured' with reference to the flowers.

In the tropics generally the orchid tree is widely cultivated for ornamental purposes. But for the Buddhists the tree is sacred and is a familiar sight growing in their temple grounds.

Leaves, flowers and young fruit pods are eaten locally in India as a vegetable in salads, and the flowers are sometimes pickled.

The leaves are also cut for fodder in some areas.

In Asia leaves provide natural casings for 'home'-rolled cigarettes.

Sometimes fibre is extracted from the bark, which is also used for dyeing and tanning.

The moderately hard, grey wood has been used for making agricultural implements – and also for building.

Medicinally, locally the bark's bitter and astringent qualities have been harnessed as an appetite stimulant. In India especially the bark has also been used to treat ulcers and skin diseases, and in poultices it has been applied to sores. The dried buds have been used in remedies for dysentery, diarrhoea, piles and worms, and the root has been used to treat snake bites.