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Corypha umbraculifera

TALIPOT is a palm. Native to Sri Lanka, India and Malaysia, it has strongly scented, creamy white to yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Alpayushi* (Sanskrit), *Bajarbattu* (Hindi), Fan palm, Giant palm, *Sritalamu* (Telugu), *Tala-gaha* (Singhalese), *Tali* (Bengali), *Talipannai* (Tamil), Talipot palm, *Talipotpalme* (German), *Talippana* (Malay, Malayalam), and Umbrella palm.

Between 26-75 year old palms of the same generation will all bloom (once) with what is claimed to be the largest head of flowers in the world (said to contain thousands of flowers). The fruit follow about 8 months later - and 12 months after that the tree dies.

Umbraculifera is derived from Latin *umbella* (parasol) and Latin *-fer* (bearing, carrying) components meaning ‘umbrella-bearing’.

The name Talipot is explained by authorities as a corruption of Hindi words meaning ‘leaf of the tall tree’ ie. *tal* and *pat*

Apparently the first European travellers to south-eastern Asia learnt to identify the importance of a potentate, dignitary or priest by the angle or way in which talipot leaves were held over his head in umbrella-fashion.

The flower is the national floral emblem of Sri Lanka. One authority makes note that the scent from these flowers can be so overpowering that if the palm is growing near habitation the flower head is often removed before the flowers open fully.

In Sri Lanka, if not elsewhere, the leaves are used for thatching and are also made into umbrellas, tents, mats, fans and sunshades. In south-eastern Asia they were used widely as a substitute for ‘paper’ too. Sacred Buddhist books were made from flattened and dried leaf strips (as one authority points out, ‘ready-ruled’) known as *olla* and were written upon with a metal style. (The leaf stalks have provided pulp for wrapping paper.) In the Philippines fine fibre called *buntal* has been extracted from unopened leaves and used to make hats.

The pith yields a form of sago that is eaten locally.

The ivory-like seeds are often used to make necklaces, buttons and other ornaments.

Local fishermen have used a paste made from the crushed young fruit to stun fish.