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Persea borbonia

[Synonyms : *Laurus borbonia*, *Nothaphoebe borbonia*, *Persea caroliniensis*, *Persea littoralis*, *Tamala borbonia*, *Tamala littoralis*]

RED BAY is an evergreen tree. Native to southern and south-eastern North America it has tiny yellowish-green flowers.

It is also known as Bay tree, Bull bay, Florida mahogany, Isabella wood, Laurel, Red tip bay, and Sweet bay.

Borbonia means ‘of or from the Island of Réunion in the Indian Ocean’ which once bore the House of Bourbon’s name, or may commemorate the French Bourbon kings (1589-1792).

From some records one might almost get the impression that red bay was the preserve of the North American Seminole Indians. Certainly they seem to have held it in such high regard medicinally that for them the leaves (in infusion or decoction) must have been a panacea for both adults and children in relatively extensive use. Apart from the roles it played in their ritual it was also used for abortion and to cause vomiting, and it was also taken as a laxative. In addition it was turned to for treating fever, lung ailments, urinary disorders, diarrhoea, headaches, vomiting, eye problems and rheumatism.

Locally the dried leaves have long provided a flavouring for soups and poultry stuffing.

In the past the hard and brittle, heavy wood has been used locally for boatbuilding – and Seminole Indians used it for making spoons. Today this very strong, bright reddish-brown timber is used sometimes for cabinetwork, and interior finishing.