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Philodendron bipinnatifidum

[Synonyms : *Philodendron lundii*, *Philodendron panduriform*, *Philodendron selloum*]

TREE PHILODENDRON is a tree-like evergreen climbing shrub. Native to south-eastern Brazil it has spikes (or spadices) of tiny fleshy white flowers shielded by fleshy, often red and purple-marked, white to greenish-yellow leaflike spathes.

It is also known as Cut-leaf philodendron, Elephant ear philodendron, Lacy tree philodendron, and Split-leaf philodendron.

The air temperature around the flower spike can be as much as 17⁰C above that surrounding it. The heat of the plant increases in the early evening and this accentuates its delicate smell to attract (in its natural habitat) scarab beetles to pollinate the flowers. (Authorities report that Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817-1911) a botanist, author and traveller who succeeded his father as Kew's Director (1865-1885) described this smell as *a mixture of rotting flesh and burnt sugar.*)

Warning – the sap can cause dermatitis and species in this genus can be poisonous if eaten.

Bipinnatifidum is a botanical reference to the leaf-shape (a feathery arrangement of leaflets).

Locally the sweet-tasting fruit pulp is eaten raw or made into preserves.

Apart from man, the white to orange or red berries are also enjoyed by monkeys and bats.

Tree philodendron is cultivated as an ornamental in India. In the West however it appears to be grown primarily as an indoor or outdoor potted plant (usually in public or commercial office buildings because of its size).

Medicinally, in local treatments the seeds are taken internally to treat intestinal worms.