

Piper betle

[Synonyms : *Artanthe hexagyna*, *Chavica auriculata*, *Chavica betle*, *Piper siriboa*]

BETEL is an evergreen, perennial climbing vine or creeping shrub. Native to India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka it has with small yellowish flowers.

It is also known as Betel leaf, *Betelo* (Esperanto), Betel pepper, *Betelpfeffer* (German), *Betelpippuri* (Finnish), Betle pepper, *Bulath-vel* (Singhalese), Chavica betel, *Ikmo* (Filipino/Tagalog), *Nagarvel* (Gujarati), *Pan* (Bengali, Hindi), *Pelu* (Thai), *Sireh* (Javanese, Malay), *Tambulam* (Malayalam), *Tambuli* (Sanskrit), *Trầu không* (Vietnamese), *Vattilai* (Tamil), *Veth-thile* (Tamil), and *Vitika* (Telugu).

Betle is derived from a local common name.

Betel in the East could in some ways be equated with tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*) in the West and is said to have been used there from at least as early as 200 BC. The betel mixture (made from a different plant, betel nut *Areca catechu*) is wrapped in betel leaves to form a ‘quid’ which is chewed not smoked. It acts as a general tonic and aids digestion as well as decreasing perspiration and enhancing physical endurance. Today some effort is being made to discourage this long traditional practice as there appears to be increasing evidence that it can promote oral cancer.

Poor people in central India in the early Centuries AD used to wrap spices in betel leaves and these were served after a meal as a breath sweetener and digestive aid. Today this custom still continues in many parts of Indian society.

Medicinally, the roots of the plant are used as an ingredient in a preparation which women in some parts of India believe acts as a long-term contraceptive. The plant is also used locally to treat wounds and respiratory disorders.