

*Salix babylonica*

[Synonyms : *Salix elegantissima*, *Salix heteromera*, *Salix matsudana*, *Salix pendula*]

**WEeping WILLOW** is a deciduous (in temperate climates) tree. Probably native to China it has tiny yellow flowers and leaves that turn yellow in Autumn.

It is also known as *Attupalai* (Telugu), Babylon weeping willow, *Bedmaju* (Bengali), *Beed* (Persian), Chinese willow, *Fontänpil* (Swedish), *Giur* (Kashmiri), *Liu* (Chinese), *Majnun* (Hindi), Napoleon's willow, Poet's willow, Ring willow, *Salgueiro Chorão* (Portuguese), *Salice piangente* (Italian), *Saliko Babilona* (Esperanto), *Saule pleureur* (French), *Sof-saf* (Arabic), *Taore-Pil* (Danish), *Tärpil* (Swedish), *Tissi* (Nepalese), *Trauerweide* (German), and *Vrba babylónská* (Czech); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of mourning, sadness, and unlucky love.

*Babylonica* means 'of or from Babylon'.

It is understood to be a parent of all varieties of weeping willow but its popularity today in horticulture is being challenged according to some authorities by another species *Salix tristis*.

This has been the most common weeping willow for some time and is likely to have been the inspiration for the celebrated Chinese willow pattern. In Oriental cultures the weeping willow has been associated with the Springtime regeneration of nature, eternal friendship, patience, perseverance and meekness.

Although it spread from the East (probably growing from discarded willow whips used by caravan drivers on trade routes) and has long been cultivated in western Asia, eastern Europe and North Africa, it only reached western Europe in the later years of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century (and Britain in 1690, 1692, 1730 or even later). After this the weeping willow was also introduced to North America.

Today in Britain it is said that most of weeping willow trees are female.

Early French settlers in New Zealand introduced cuttings of this species from plants growing in the burial place of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) emperor of France on St. Helena (and similar cuttings are said to have found their way to many other places in America, Asia and Europe as well). The story goes that Napoleon chose to sit under one particular willow on the Island every day during his exile.

North American Cherokee Indians respected the weeping willow for medicinal qualities. Its bark provided a tonic and it was also used to treat hoarseness, fever and diarrhoea. As with white willow (*Salix alba*) the tribe also used a bark infusion or decoction as a hair wash to encourage growth.

It is the birthday flower for 21<sup>st</sup> May.