



BAY

Latin: *Laurus nobilis*

Welsh: Llawrwydden

Also known as Sweet Bay/Sweet Laurel, Bay is a member of the Lauraceae family. Bay was highly regarded by the ancient Greeks and Romans, a respect emphasised in its botanical name (Latin: *laurus* to praise, and *nobilis* renowned or famous).

The ancient Greeks dedicated the Bay to Apollo, the god of prophecy, poetry and healing. At Apollo's shrine at Delphi, the priestess ate Bay leaves before expounding his oracles ...possibly in a narcotic state induced by the Bay leaves!

The highest honour a Greek poet or warrior could receive was to be crowned with a garland of Laurel leaves ('Laurel' being a synonym for 'Bay').

That tradition survives today: Britain has its Poet Laureate (the Latin *laureate* means 'crowned with laurel'): France has its Baccalaureate, and a victor's crown of Laurel is often awarded to victorious sportsmen & women.

Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine, had Bay dedicated to him, and down the centuries Bay was credited with powerful antiseptic properties and was also believed to guard against diseases such as the plague.

In the C16th the English physician and monk, Andrew Boorde recommended burning Bay leaves 'to expel corrupt and contagious air' in the cellar, kitchen and the larder.

The Bay's aromatic leathery leaves are an essential ingredient of a *bouquet garni*, and can be used to flavour both sweet and savoury dishes.

In folk medicine Bay was applied externally as an oil to relieve rheumatic pains.

The 'Green Bay Tree' can reach a height of 26ft (8m) with a spread of 12ft (3m). Clipped Bay trees (standards, pyramids or balls) have long been ornamental features of gardens.