

Bauhinia

It is with some trepidation that I start writing the Bauhinia tree profile, knowing that there are several types of Bauhinias: *Bauhinia racemosa*, *Bauhinia purpurea*, *Bauhinia x blakeana*, and *Bauhinia variegata*. In any case, I shall try to do justice to these gorgeous trees.



“*Bauhinia*” was named after twin brothers and botanists John and Gaspard Bauhin, in reference to the twin lobed leaves of the trees.

Bauhinia racemosa

Common names: Apta, Jhinjheri, Burmese silk orchid, Ashta, Gurial, Maula, Sona

Scientific name: *Bauhinia racemosa*



Native to India, Myanmar, and China, *Bauhinia racemosa* is distinguishable from the other *Bauhinia* species by having smaller leaves and smaller, white flowers. Like other *Bauhinias*, the twin lobed leaves are shaped like a camel's foot. Its fruits are curved, woody pods. It is a small, deciduous, and crooked tree with a dark bark.

During Dussehra, friends and family give each other the *Bauhinia racemosa* leaves as gold, as it symbolizes prosperity.

The seeds are eaten roasted, the bark is utilized for dyeing, and the wood can be used as fuelwood. The leaves are sometimes used to make beedis. Parts of the tree are used in traditional medicine: for inflammation, fever,

skin infection, etc. Parts possess anti-inflammatory, antispasmodic, antiulcer, antimicrobial properties.

Bauhinia purpurea

Common name: Purple bauhinia, butterfly tree, orchid tree, kaniar,

Scientific name: *Bauhinia purpurea*

Like other *Bauhinias*, the leaves are divided into two lobes which are alike in size. The tree has large, fragrant flowers which are pink, lilac, and white, and flat, pointy pods. The pods burst to eject the seeds. Unlike other *Bauhinias*, the petals of the flowers don't overlap.

The leaves can be eaten as they are, or pickled and then eaten. They are also useful as fodder. The bark is utilized for dyeing and in the tanning industry. Parts of the tree are utilized in traditional medicine systems, and the tree shows antidiabetic, anti-diarrheal, anticancer activities. The tree is also grown ornamentally, due to its vibrant flowers.

Bauhinia x blakeana

Common name: Hong Kong Orchid Tree

Scientific name: *Bauhinia x blakeana*

A deciduous tree, the Hong Kong orchid tree has camel hoof shaped leaves which are larger than the leaves of other bauhinias, and flowers which are also bigger than those of other bauhinias. The flowers are large and crimson-purple.



A single specimen of the Hong Kong orchid tree was discovered in Hong Kong by missionaries. The tree was introduced to the Hong Kong Botanical Garden and named *Bauhinia x blakeana* to honor the Governor of Hong Kong. The tree is a hybrid between *Bauhinia purpurea* and *Bauhinia variegata*: as a hybrid, the tree is hence sterile and does not usually produce fruit. It can only be propagated by vegetative cloning. It is hence believed that every Hong Kong orchid tree alive today comes from that single *Bauhinia x blakeana* tree.

The Hong Kong orchid is the floral emblem of Hong Kong, and is featured on Hong Kong's flag.

Bauhinia variegata

Common name: Kachnar, Mountain ebony, Variegated Bauhinia, Kailar, Guiral, Padrian

Scientific name: *Bauhinia variegata*

Bauhinia variegata var *variegata* has pink, white, and purplish flowers. *Bauhinia variegata* var *candida* has white flowers. The flowers' petals overlap. The trees have camel hoof shaped twin lobed leaves, and pods that burst to scatter seeds.

They are often grown for ornamental purposes, and the buds and flowers are eaten. An internet search shows recipes of "Kachnar ki khatti subzi" and "Kachnari mutton masala", which are prepared in Himachal Pradesh. The seeds are rich in protein, and parts of the tree are utilized in traditional medicine systems. Some parts have antibacterial, antifungal, anti-inflammatory, anticancer properties.