



## Nakshatra Vanam

### Aslesa - Ayilyam

#### Alexandrian laurel Tree



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**Botanical Name:** *Calophyllum inophyllum*  
**Tamil Name:** Punnai  
**Sanskrit Name:** Punnaga  
**English Name:** Alexandrian laurel

#### Habitat

It is a beautiful large evergreen tree with sweet-scented flowers and the spreading crown attains a height of 12m. The tree is native to southern coastal India, East Africa, Malaysia and Australia. It is a low-branching and slow-growing tree with a broad and irregular crown. It usually reaches 8 to 20 m in height. The tree supports a dense canopy of glossy, elliptical leaves. The very fragrant white flowers are 25 mm across and occur in racemose or paniculate inflorescences consisting of 4 to 15 flowers. The flowers have snow-white petals with a thick centre of yellow stamens. The fragrant flowers have been prized as an adornment and as a perfume. The fruit is a round, green drupe reaching 2 to 4 cm in diameter and having a single large seed. When ripe, the fruit is wrinkled and its color varies from yellow to brownish-red. This tree grows in tropical, dry evergreen regions of the Coromandel Coast. Ferrolitic sandy loam and farm soil are suitable for its growth.

#### Temples associated with the tree

District	Village/Town	Temple	Deity
Chennai	Mylapore	Kapaleeswarar	Shiva
Cuddalore	Tirunaaraiyur	Suyamprakasar	Shiva
Villuppuram	Mayilam	Subramaniaswami	Muruga
Villuppuram	Tirukoilur	Ulagalandhaperumal	Vishnu
Nagappattinam	Moovalur pureeswarar	Murugasagaya	Shiva
Nagappattinam	Ambarperuntiru	Brahmapureeswarar	Shiva
Nagappattinam	Vedharanyam	Vedhapureeswarar	Shiva
Pudukkottai	Tirupunavasal	Palampathinathar	Shiva
Tanjavur	Pullamboothangudi	Dhayanidheeswarar	Vishnu
Tiruchirapalli	Sri Ranganam	Sri Ranganathar	Vishnu
Tiruchirapalli	Aandikurumpoor	Narayanaperumal	Vishnu
Virudhunagar	Tiruchuliyal	Tirumeninathar	Shiva

## Medicinal Uses

The tree is believed to have diuretic properties. The gum extracted from the plant is emetic and purgative and is used for the treatment of wounds and ulcers. An infusion of gum, bark and leaves is used for sore eyes. The resin may be useful for chronic cataract. Taken internally, the bark acts as expectorant and it is useful in chronic bronchitis. The leaves soaked in water are applied to inflamed eyes in Fiji. The leaf infusion is taken internally for heatstroke. In Cambodia, the leaves are prescribed as an inhalation for migraine and vertigo and the oil for scabies. The plant has a rich history of use. Ancient native black tribes throughout Papua New Guinea utilized the leaves frequently for different kinds of skin problems. The natives in New Caledonia and Samoa use the leaves for different skin inflammations, leg ulcers and wounds. An infusion of the fruit is said to be pectoral and stimulant of the mucous membrane of the lungs. The seed oil is used to soften skin inflammations and insect bites (Senthil 2015).



## Religious Association



*Punnai*, the Alexandrian laurel has been regarded as the sacred tree in India. The tree is sacred to Lord Shiva and Vishnu. The flower of the *punnaga* is one of the eight flowers offered to Lord Shiva during early morning worship. *Punnai* tree is also associated in the science of astrology under the constellation Ayilyam (Āśleṣā).

## Mythology/ Folklore

According to the Sthala Purana of the Suyambarakasar temple at Tirunaaraiyur, this place was named as punnaga vanam and was predominantly covered by the *punnai* tree. According to mythology, the punnai tree is known to react to certain actions of women. If the *punnai* tree passes its flowering stage without flowering, the women dance around and kick the base of the tree, after which it blooms (Agarwala, 1970).

According to a local folk-tale, once a sage named Durvasa worshipped the *Swayambu lingam* under the *punnai* tree. He was often disturbed by a gandharva while worshipping the lord. The sage got angry and cursed him to become a naarai (Heron). The gandharva begged his pardon and requested redemption, upon which, the sage advised him to worship the lingam which stood under the *Punnai* tree, with water from the river Ganges. Thereafter, the naarai, worshiped the lingam everyday with water from the Ganges. One day, while the naarai was bringing the water from the river, it was caught in a cyclone. Regardless of nature's fury the naarai brought the water and bathed the lingam and finally got rid of the curse. Since then the name of this sacred place has remained Tirunaaraiyur near Cuddalore district.

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