



Nakshatra Vanam

VISAGAM - Wood Apple Tree



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Botanical Name: *Limonia acidissima* L.

Tamil Name: Vila

Sanskrit Name: Dadhiphala

English Name: Wood apple

Habitat

Deciduous trees, to 20 m high, bark dark-grey or black, deeply cracked longitudinally; thorns straight, to 2.5 cm, axillary. Leaves imparipinnate, alternate, 1-3 in a cluster, estipulate; rachis 60-80 mm long, stout, glabrous, often narrowly winged; leaflets 4-7, opposite, sessile, estipellate; lamina 1.3-3.8 × 1.3 cm, obovate, base cuneate or acute, apex obtuse, margin entire, glabrous, pellucid-punctate, coriaceous; lateral nerves pinnate, obscure, intercostae obscure. Flowers polygamous, dull red, 1.3 cm across, in axillary cymes; calyx small, flat, 5-toothed, pubescent with out, deciduous; petals 5, free, spreading; stamens 10-12, inserted round the disc; filaments dilated below, villous on face and margins; anthers linear-oblong; disc thick, annular, pubescent; pistillode short; ovary superior, oblong, 5-6-celled, at length 1-celled, ovules many; stigma oblong, fusiform. Fruit a berry, 5-7.6 cm across, globose, whitish-brown, rind hard and woody; seeds many (India Biodiversity Portal).



Religious Association

The tree is sacred to Lord Shiva. The Brhat samhita describes the method of its planting (Brhat samhita, Vriksayurveda, Verse 22). It is sacred to Brahmanas. According to the *Koorma purana*, studying in the shade of this plant is prohibited. The tree has also been associated with the subject of astrology under the constellation *Visagam*.

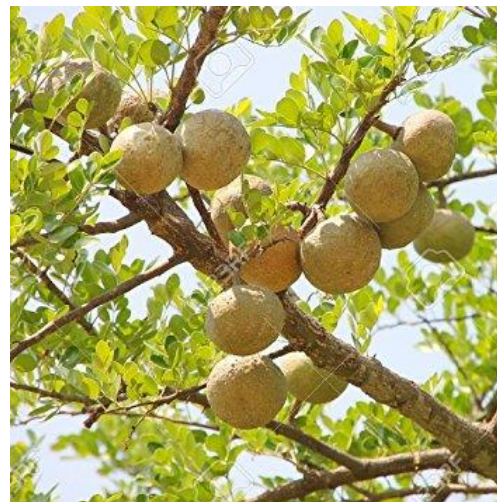
Temples associated with the Wood Apple Tree

District	Village/Town	Temple	Deity
Nagappattinam	Tirukarayil	Kannayairanadhar	Shiva

(Source – Sacred Trees of Tamil Nadu – 2005 by M. Amirthalingam)

Medicinal uses and other benefits

The fruit of the tree is highly edible and can be made syrups, drinks, jelly, and jams. However, the rind of the wood apple fruit is very hard. Other useful parts of the plant are the roots, fruits, and leaves of this tree that are used for medicinal purposes. The fruit contains carbohydrates and proteins. It is also rich in beta-carotene, vitamin B, vitamin C, thiamine, and riboflavin. It destroys intestinal worms and cures chronic dysentery. It is also useful in the treatment of piles and stomach ulcers. For diarrhea and stomach problems, the ripe pulp mixed with honey and cumin seeds can be taken. It is also useful for constipation problems. (Pratima Vijayvargia *et.al* 2014)



The gum can be used in the treatment of diabetes. It has been found that the leaves are useful in the treatment of sore throat, chronic cough, and other respiratory problems. A mixture made of wood apple, salt and tamarind can cure hiccups. For joint pain, use wood apple poultice made from the leaves. The fruit can be used as a tonic, a powder or poultice. The leaves, bark and roots have many medicinal uses like the treatment of snakebites.

The tree has a number of other uses for example, the pectin can be purified and used in making small containers or boxes, the gum can be used as a substitute for gum Arabic; it can also be used for making watercolors, dyes, inks, and varnishes. The wood of the tree can be used in construction and also as a fuel. The rind of the fruit contains oil that can be made into fragrances and also to make a dye used on fabrics.



Conclusion

The wood apple tree is an extremely useful one. The fruit is found in two forms, namely, the large sweet version and the small acidic one. However, in spite of its manifold uses, the value of this tree has not been recognized fully. It was being considered only as a poor man's fruit. Only in the 1950s, the full value of the tree was discovered and it began to be used for medical and other purposes. Now the fruit is much sought after by rich people for health purposes but it is not readily available.

