



Nava Graha Vanam

Kethu – Darbha Grass



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Botanical Name: *Imperata cylindrica* (L.) Raeusch.

Tamil Name: Darbhai pullu

Sanskrit Name: Darbha

English Name: Sword Grass

Habitat

Perennials. Culms 40-120 cm high, rhizomatous; nodes bearded. Leaves 12-50 x 0.5-1.2 cm, lanceolate or linear-lanceolate, base narrowed, mostly basal, glaucous; sheaths overlapping, to 8 cm long; ligule ovate, membranous. Panicles 4-18 cm long, spici-form, cylindrical, white silky hairy. Spike-lets 2.5-4 mm long, lanceolate, similar, pedicelled, enveloped in long silky hairs. Lower glume 2-3 x 1 mm, lanceolate, long-pilose without. Upper glume similar. Lower floret empty. Upper floret bisexual. First lemma 1.5-2 x 1 mm, oblong-lanceolate, hyaline, apex ciliate. Second lemma 1-1.5 x 1 mm, elliptic-lanceolate, hyaline. Palea 0.5-1 mm long, obovate. Stamens 2; anthers c. 3 mm long, orange-yellow. Ovary oblong; stigmas 2-3 mm long. (<https://indiabiodiversity.org> and <http://keralaplants.in>).

KETU - കേതു - केतु



Religious association

The Sword Grass (*Imperata cylindrica*) has long been associated with the subject of astrology under the planet *Kethu* (*Kedhu*). This grass is also considered as the *sthala virksha* of the Thirunallar temple in Karaikkal district in which the deity is Lord Shiva as Dharbaranyeswara.

Medicinal uses and other benefits

The Darbha is a grass consisting of roots, rhizome and leaves. It is widely used in religious and ceremonial functions. It has many properties such as sweetness, cooling, oleaginous, diuretic and aphrodisiac. It can be gainfully used in the treatment of diseases of blood and bladder, dysentery, gonorrhoea, biliousness, asthma, thirst, strangury, jaundice, vaginal discharges, menorrhagia, vesicle calculi, skin eruptions, vomiting, sedative to pregnant uterus, hypertension and snake bite. The culms of this grass are considered to be diuretic and can be used in the treatment of dysentery and menorrhagia.

The grass is very strong and is used as a raw material for the manufacture of paper. It can also be used for thatching and rope making. However, cattle do not eat the grass, but buffalos eat the tender leaves. Hence it can be used as a fodder in a mixture of grass and wheat. Its chemical properties consist of active principles like Cylindrine, Arundoin, Fermenol, Isoarborinol, Semiarenol, Cylindol A & B, Gramenone A & B, Imperanene etc. (A. Rama Murthy and Bidhan Mahajon, 2016).

Other Uses

Darbha grass has medicinal qualities and can even be used in construction activities and as a fiber and an ornamental. Since it contains young inflorescences, the shoots may be eaten after cooking. The roots contain starch and sugars (A. Rama Murthy and Bidhan Mahajon, 2016). Darbha grass can be used to make durable grass mat. Hence it gives employment to a large number of people in India.



Photo Source: www.vikatan.com

Conclusion

Darbha grass is a heritage plant that has been traditionally growing in India, since time immemorial. Since it is growing naturally, it is very useful in maintaining the ecosystem services. It is a hardy plant and can withstand the hot climate prevalent in the country. It is a traditional plant that is used in the Hindu ceremonies and customs. In the days gone by, it was hung outside the door of houses in order to ward off dosham and infectious diseases. However, of late, this practice has fallen into disuse. This Darbha grass has been graphically described in the ancient Indian classical epics such as the Vedas and Puranas. However, in the modern age this knowledge has been neglected.

