Indian Laurel

Ficus microcarpa

Code: TREE-1D4FE96FF8A343E **Location:** XIM University Campus **Local / Vernacular name:** ସହଜ

Botanical Details

Leaf habit: Evergreen Flowers / Fruits: Tiny flowers hidden inside the fig syconium; small, round figs turn from green to reddish-purple when ripe Native range: South & Southeast Asia to Pacific islands

Uses & Importance

Ecological: Ficus microcarpa functions as a vital keystone species within its native range, providing a steady, year-round food supply through its prolific fig production. Unlike many other trees, it often fruits asynchronously, ensuring that birds, bats, and small mammals have a reliable "emergency" food source during seasons when other fruits are scarce. The tree is central to one of nature's most complex symbiotic relationships: the fig-wasp mutualism, where specialized agaonid wasps enter the enclosed syconium to pollinate the hidden internal flowers while laying their eggs. Beyond its role as a food provider, its architectural complexity is immense. The massive evergreen canopy acts as a cooling umbrella, significantly reducing ground temperatures and providing essential nesting sites for urban and forest avian species. The tree’s characteristic aerial roots, which descend from branches to the ground, eventually thicken into "pillar roots," creating a dense, labyrinthine habitat for various reptiles, epiphytes, and invertebrates. These roots also provide excellent soil stabilization, particularly in humid tropical environments where they prevent topsoil washout during heavy monsoons. In urban settings, it is a powerhouse of air filtration, trapping dust and absorbing pollutants, though its aggressive root system requires significant space to prevent damage to man-made structures.

Medicinal: In traditional medicine across South and Southeast Asia, Ficus microcarpa is valued for its astringent, anti-inflammatory, and antimicrobial properties. The bark and aerial roots are frequently prepared as decoctions to treat gastrointestinal distress, including chronic diarrhea and dysentery, by toning the intestinal lining. For dermatological health, the leaves and bark are used in poultices to treat stubborn ulcers, wounds, and various skin diseases, accelerating tissue regeneration. The milky white latex (sap) produced by the tree is a well-known folk remedy for dental issues; it is applied topically to soothe toothaches and reduce gum inflammation. In the management of metabolic disorders, specific extracts from the bark have been used in traditional practices to help regulate blood sugar levels in diabetic patients. The tree also plays a role in respiratory health, where leaf infusions are used as a gargle to treat sore throats and as an expectorant for minor respiratory ailments. Modern phytochemical screening has identified various triterpenoids, flavonoids, and phenolic compounds within the plant that contribute to its antioxidant capacity, protecting cells from oxidative stress. Its diverse range of applications—from healing deep

wounds with its latex to treating systemic internal inflammation with bark extracts—marks it as a comprehensive natural pharmacy in the rural landscapes where it thrives.

Cultural: The Indian Laurel holds a position of deep spiritual and social reverence, often regarded as a symbol of immortality and protection due to its expansive growth and extreme longevity. In Hindu and Buddhist traditions, it is frequently planted near temples and shrines, creating a "sacred grove" atmosphere where the dense shade provides a peaceful space for meditation and community gathering. The tree is often associated with the concept of the "World Tree," representing eternal life as its aerial roots reach down to the earth to form new trunks, seemingly defying death . In many Southeast Asian cultures, the tree is believed to be the dwelling place of spirits or guardian deities, and it is common to see small offerings or colorful cloths tied around its trunk as a mark of respect. Socially, it has historically served as the "village umbrella" or Chaupal, where elders gather to discuss local matters under its cooling canopy, protecting the community from the harsh tropical sun. Its use as an ornamental bonsai subject is also culturally significant, particularly in East Asia, where it symbolizes harmony between nature and humanity through the art of " Penjing." The tree’s ability to survive in harsh conditions and its majestic, sprawling presence have made it a universal icon of resilience, often featuring in local folklore as a silent witness to the passing of generations and a guardian of the land’s history.

Location

GPS: 20.15860192, 85.76535449

Directions: https://www.google.com/maps/dir/?api=1&travelmode=walking&destination=20.15860192%2C85.76535449