

Flowering Trees



Ficus benghalensis L. also spelt as *Ficus bengalensis* (English: Banyan; Hindi: Bargad) of Moraceae is a giant evergreen tree with spreading branches which are supported by aerial roots that go down into the soil to form the 'props'. (A banyan tree in Calcutta Botanical Gardens has a main stem 45 feet in girth and its branches cover an area of nearly 900 feet in circumference) (Picture shows a 300 year old tree growing at Bidadi near Bangalore that houses a large natural cave in its trunk): Milky latex is present in all parts of the plant. Leaves are simple and alternate with prominent veins. Flowers are small, inconspicuous and are enclosed in a fleshy receptacular inflorescence. The receptacle, at the fruiting stage, enlarges like in a fig fruit and is orange red.

Banyan tree is considered sacred by Hindus and is largely grown near temples. The wood is grey, moderately hard and durable under water. The wood of the 'props' is stronger than that of the main trunk. The timber is used for making well-curbs, furniture, crates, door panels and cart-shafts. The props are used for tent poles and umbrella handles. The leaves are used as fodder for cattle and elephants.

The milky latex is applied externally for treating pains in rheumatism and in lumbago. The infusion of the bark is used against dysentery, diarrhoea and diabetes.