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# Mudilla: The tree that treats many ailments

Mudilla is a tree often seen near water, particularly the sea. It is medium-sized with smoothly curved branches. The bark is grey with prominent scars. The leaves are large, glossy and dark green and are found crowded in bunches at the ends of the branches.

The flowers are fairly large (about 12cm wide) and have four thick, waxy petals, with many pink tipped stamens. They open in the evenings and emanate a pleasant scent. The Mudilla can be pink or white. There is no flowering season. The fruits are four sided with distinct straight edges. They float in and are dispersed by water.

The wood of the tree is soft and white and is used by people to make boats, cabinets and other furniture. The inner fittings of railway carriages and carts are made of this wood. A tanning material is also extracted from the bark.

Mudilla is also used for medicinal purposes. The bark has astringent qualities and is used to treat diarrhoea. The seed is rubbed on a stone with water to make a paste which is then applied on the sternum of children suffering from phlegm. The paste can be combined with ginger juice for those suffering from bronchial

ailments. The roots and seeds have similarities in composition to quinine and are used in treating malaria. The tree is rich in tannin which can be used to stop bleeding. Fresh and dried Mudilla leaves boiled in water for 15 minutes can refresh feet and hands.

The Buddha is said to have meditated under a Mudilla tree prior to attaining enlightenment. When it began to rain heavily, a king cobra is said to have spread its hood over the Buddha and given Him protection.

Mudilla is also known as Midella and Diya Mudilla in Sinhalese. In Tamil it is called Arattam. The common name is the Indian Oak. The scientific name is *Barringtonia racemosa* or *Barringtonia asiatica*. There are two varieties, the *racemosa* bearing pink flowers and the

*asiatica* bearing white flowers. The tree is indigenous to Sri Lanka and is found near estuaries, rivers and lakes (*racemosa*) and on seashores, roadsides and in home gardens (*asiatica*). In Colombo it can be seen near Galle Face and in the premises of the Swimming Club.

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