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It's not just pretty, but medicinal too

The *Kobo leela* as it is known locally is a small tree with a bark that is smooth and grey-brown. It has large leaves with two lobes truncated at the base giving them a slightly heart-like shape. It is a deciduous tree.

The flowers of this tree vary in colour from white to mauve depending on the species. They are fragrant and reminiscent of orchids. The flowering season is said to be between February and April. However, a second flowering season can be observed during September and October in Colombo. The fruits of the *Kobo leela* are pendulous, flattened legumes with many seeds.

This tree has great ornamental value with its pretty, fragrant flowers. It is also known for its medicinal properties. The root, bark and flowers are used in traditional medicine.

The bark is used with other ingredients for enlargements of the glands of the neck, tumours, ulcers and skin diseases. A decoction made from the root is used for flatulence and dyspepsia. It is also prevents decomposition of the blood in leprosy patients. The bark made into a decoction is used for reducing weight. The dried flower buds are used as a cure for piles and dysentery.

As mentioned earlier there are many species of *Bauhinia* differing slightly from each other, for example in the colour of the flowers. However they all have two points in common. Firstly there is a splash of colour on one or more of the petals of each flower. For example the tree featured here would

PLANT SALE

Ruk Rakaganno will hold a plant sale on Saturday, October 22 from 9.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. at Kithu Sevana (next to the Cathedral on Baudhdhaloka Mw, Col. 7). For more details contact 2554438 or rukraks@sltnet.lk

have a smudge of deeper pink at the base of one or two petals. The white flowered *Bauhinia* has a splash of yellow at the base of some of the petals. The second point that the *Bauhinias* have in common is the united, twin-kidney formation of the leaves. The trees can easily be identified by this characteristic.

Known in Sinhala as the *Kobo leela* this tree is referred to as the *Mandarai* or *Segappu Mandarai* in Tamil. The scientific name is *Bauhinia variegata*.

In English it is commonly referred to as the *Bauhinia*. In India it has been known as the *Mountain Ebony*. It was introduced into Sri Lanka from Eastern Asia.

It grows naturally in India and Burma. In Sri Lanka it is grown fairly commonly for its ornamental as well as its medicinal value. Certain species, for example the *White flowered Bauhinia* are better known for their medicinal properties than others. In Colombo a couple of the places you can see these trees are in the grounds of the Cathedral on Baudhdhaloka Mawatha and in the garden of Ladies College.



Compiled by Ruk Rakaganno, The Tree Society of Sri Lanka