



NAKSHATRA VANAM

The Amla Tree



M. Subramanian,
Project Officer,
C.P.R. Environmental Education Centre, Chennai

Botanical Name:	<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i>
Tamil Name:	Nelli
Sanskrit Name:	Amalika
English Name:	Gooseberry
Nakshatram:	Barani

Habitat

It is a small deciduous medium size tree, bark grey-brown, rough, irregularly flaking; blaze pink-red. Leaves simple, alternate, bifarious on short deciduous branchlets, flowers unisexual, 2-3 mm across, greenish-yellow, densely clustered in leaf axils; male flowers: sepals 6, oblanceolate, obtuse, stamens 3, female flowers: sepals 6, oblanceolate, obtuse; fruit a capsule 1.5-2.5 cm across, subglobose, dehiscent into 6 cocci, disc enlarged to give an appearance of fleshy yellowish-green, indehiscent berry, cultivated in gardens at home. It is native to Sri Lanka and parts of Burma and can grow in different soils.

Medicinal Uses

The Amla fruit is rich in Vitamin C and is a diuretic, laxative and hair dye. It cures insomnia and is healthy for hair. It is used as the cardio protective, useful in hemorrhage, menorrhagia, heavy discharge of blood from uterus, leucorrhoea, asthma, bronchitis, sugar complaints, cancer, stress and tension and is said to be a good liver tonic. Amla powder and oil are used traditionally in Ayurvedic applications for the treatment of scalp. Amla powder improves immunity and gives physical strength. It improves complexion and removes wrinkles. Amla is also used to treat constipation and is used as a cooling agent to reduce the effects of sun strokes and sun burns.



Other uses

It is the main element used in the shampoo. Amla oil is used all over the world in sauces, candy, dried chips, pickle, jellies and powder. It is even used in the dyeing industry. Its extract is commonly used in the preparation of ink. Wood is commonly used as fuel wood.

Religious Association

Amla has been regarded as the sacred tree in India. The tree is sacred to Lord Shiva and Vishnu. It is also associated with Lakshmi and Parvati. Lakshmi, the Goddess of Prosperity, is believed to reside in the fruit which is therefore worshiped as the Mother Earth (Gupta, 1991). *Phyllanthus emblica* is also associated in the science of astrology under the constellation Barani.



Mythology

Amalaka is one among the plants depicted in the bas-reliefs of the Sanchi Stupa (Foucher, 1914). Nelli, the Indian gooseberry is sacred to the Hindus. It is also associated with the fertility cult (Dwivedi and Tiwari, 1989). According to Sacred Trees of India (2005), the amla tree is the sthala vriksha of Uchivaneswarar Temple, Tirunelvayil Village, Kalumalainadhar Temple, Jayamkondom Village, Somanathar Temple, Palaiyarai Village, Swaminathasamy Temple, Swamimalai Village and Amlakavaneswarar Temple, Tirunellika Village.
