

# Maintaining their own uniqueness

Size, shape, petal arrangement, and the highlighted marking on a single petal gives a face to the flowers of Bauhinia, writes **N. CHANDRAMOHAN REDDY**

## What is in name?

► The name *Bauhinia* honours Swiss-French botanist brothers from the 16th century, Johannes and Caspar Bauhin. They were identical twin brothers, making the naming apt for the two identical lobes of the leaves.

► *Bauhinia blakeana* was discovered in about 1880 by a French Catholic Missionary in Hong Kong, and propagated. It was later named for Sir Henry Blake, the British Governor of Hong Kong, who was a keen amateur botanist, by S. T. Dunn, Superintendent of the Botanical and Forestry Department, who made the first thorough scientific description of the plant.

## Other uses

- Young pods, leaves and buds are used as vegetables.
- Bark is used for cordage and as a source of tannin.
- Tree yields a useful gum.
- Oil extracted from the seeds is edible.
- Wrappings of bidis are made from the leaves.
- Leaves of the woody climber *Bauhinia vahlii* are traditionally used for making leaf plates and cups.
- Roots and bark are used in traditional medicine.
- Timber is good for agricultural implements.



**COLOURFUL:** A tree of Bauhinia in full bloom. – PHOTOS: N. CHANDRAMOHAN REDDY

Many blooms are better appreciated in bunches, quite a few sacrificing their own individuality for the sake of drenching the plant in striking hues. Blossoms of Bauhinia beg to differ. Even while being prolific, they maintain their own personality expressed by way of size, shape, petal arrangement, and most importantly, the highlighted marking on a single petal which gives a face to the flower!

*Bauhinia* is a versatile plant genus having about 300 species with different forms – shrubs, trees, creepers and woody climbers, most of them are indigenous to India, South China and South East Asia. They all have two points in common – one is the large flower with five free petals and the other is the united, twin-kidney shaped leaves. *Bauhinia* belongs to the taxonomic family Leguminosae (Fabaceae). Bauhinia tree is otherwise known as Moun-

## GREEN MATTERS

tain Ebony, Orchid tree, Kanchan or Kachnar and it is revered in Buddhist and Hindu religions.

### Characteristics

Bauhinias are fast growing deciduous or semi-evergreen plants. Leaves are alternately arranged on the branches and are cleft halfway into two identical lobes.

The flowers are large, orchid-like, and in shades of purple, red, pink, white, or yellow. Out of the five petals, generally one is prominent with dark markings. The flowers grow in short sprays bearing two or three blooms, either from the ends of the branches or from the axils of the leaves. Flowers of most of the species are fragrant.

Pods are long, narrow, up to one foot in length and contain ten to fifteen compressed seeds. They generally ripen in May to June after the flower-

## Popular ornamental Bauhinias

Scientific name	Common name	Habit	Flower colour	Blooming season
<i>Bauhinia blakeana</i>	Hong Kong Orchid Tree	Tree	Deep purple	Winter, Spring
<i>Bauhinia purpurea</i>	Purple Bauhinia Tree	Tree	Purple	Winter, Spring
<i>Bauhinia variegata</i>	Orchid Tree, Camel's Foot Tree, Mountain Ebony	Tree	Light pink	Spring, Summer
<i>Bauhinia variegata var. candida</i>	White Orchid Tree	Tree	White	Spring, Summer
<i>Bauhinia monandra</i>	Butterfly Bauhinia	Tree	Pale Pink	Spring, Summer
<i>Bauhinia galpinii</i>	Red Bauhinia	Creeper	Orange Red	Intermittently all year round
<i>Bauhinia acuminata</i>	Dwarf Bauhinia	Shrub	White	Intermittently all year round
<i>Bauhinia tomentosa</i>	Yellow Bauhinia, Yellow Bells	Large shrub / small tree	Light Yellow	Intermittently all year round

ing season is over.

### Gardening

The tree Bauhinia (Orchid tree) is compact, low statured and makes a spectacular specimen or group plant in a garden or can be used as a

shade-tree for road sides. The creeping varieties can be planted as ground covers or trained on trellises, low walls or arches. (Details of popular Bauhinias used in garden planting are given in the box) 'Bauhinia blakeana', the

most spectacular and very popular garden tree is of great horticultural value. It is sterile and is the result of natural hybridization between the species 'B. purpurea' and 'B. variegata'. It has prolonged bloom period from November

to February. Since it is a sterile hybrid, it does not produce the pods, which are otherwise very unsightly.

Some cultivars of Bauhinias have been developed with leaf variegation. With their fragrance and nectar, Bauhinia flowers attract small birds and insects.

### Care and maintenance

Bauhinias grow well in slightly acidic soils. They cannot tolerate salty and ill-drained conditions. They come up well in full sun but can be grown under partial shade also. Generous watering is required during summer but moderate moisture will suffice in winter.

Most of the Bauhinias are tolerant of drought conditions. They can survive on gravelly and rocky soils too, as long as feeding is done by the way of manures or fertilizers. Slow-release fertilizers may be used to keep the plants attractive with dark green leaves and good

branching. As Bauhinias often suffer from potassium deficiency, it is always recommended to use fertilizers with potassium base.

To ensure proper timing of flowering, leaf drop is induced by reducing watering during winter. Winter irrigation retains leaves and causes sporadic flowering rather than intense blooms.

### Pruning

Bauhinia trees, with their prolific branching, develop a disorganized tangle of branches in the canopy. So pruning of branches after flowering season shall be taken up to keep the canopy well-structured and also to have better blooming.

Prune the lower branches on young trees and drooping branches in mature trees to encourage upward growth, rather than horizontal growth. Cutting back the branches by a third will promote heavy blooms in the following season. But heavy

pruning before flowering can disrupt the natural timing or production of flowers.

### Pests and problems

Bauhinias are very hardy plants and do not usually suffer from pests and diseases. Chewing insects, mealy bugs, caterpillars, mites and borers may cause problems when the plants are grown under shade or in ill-drained soils. Yellowing or burning of leaves occurs with potassium or micronutrient deficiency. The problems can be overcome with common pest / nutrient management practices.

### Propagation

All the species of 'Bauhinia' can be easily propagated through seeds. 'Bauhinia blakeana', which throws out sterile flowers, can be propagated by cuttings or air-layering.

(The author is a forest officer and can be contacted at 'nchandramohanreddy@gmail.com')

## Havells launches new range of home appliances

A slew of new home appliances, including water heaters, mixer grinders, tea and coffee makers were launched by Havells India Limited here on Wednesday.

The company officials said the home appliances market coming three years was expected to generate revenues to the tune of Rs.300 crore.

Havells home appliances were developed for convenience and has features such as energy efficiency, maintenance free, cost effectiveness, elegance and customer-friendly, they said.

"For example, in our water heaters, users can set a time in advance to heat the water. So if users need hot water at 7.30 a.m. everyday, they can set that specific time. All along the year, hot water will be available at that time without having to worry about switching the water heater on," explained senior vice-president, Havells India Ltd, Jothish Kumar.

The water heaters would be available for 15 litres and 25 litres along with digital display actual temperature inside the tank.

"The price of our water heaters range between Rs.7,000 and Rs.8,500," Mr. Kumar added.

M. Sai Gopal



Rice cooker

The coffee maker of Havells is capable of brewing 'filter' coffee.

"The crystal tea maker is made up of glass structure that will allow users to see what is happening inside. The filter coffee can serve up to 12 cups. It also has a feature that helps to avoid spilling of the coffee droplets from the dispense knob just above the carafe," Mr. Kumar explained.

The Havells officials said that the mixer grinder has a powerful 750 watt motor.

"The motor is powerful and yet the grinder comes with a sleek look. It is capable of grinding items for idli, dosa batter, coconut, etc. All of the products are ergonomically designed," he added.

## Construction machinery company opens store

Universal Construction Machinery and Equipment, the construction equipment company with exports to more than 45 countries, now expands to the State and it commenced its retail business here with the launch of Universal Exclusive at Ramgopalpet in the city.

This is Universal's ninth exclusive store in the country and the displays vertical material handling and concreting equipments apart from taking care of after sales and

spares. It also plans to launch its exclusive stores in Chennai, Cochin and Bangalore soon. Speaking on the occasion, Ranjit More, Managing Director, Universal Construction Machinery and Equipment said the reason behind opening a store here was to cater to the ever growing infrastructure needs of South India. The customer would be able to see all the equipments at one single point, and also get after sales service.

# Painting the house green

From furniture to walls to flooring, you can make your entire home eco-friendly, says **SUVASINI SRIDHARAN**

Saving the environment isn't just left to eco-warriors and Green Peace activists anymore. Green is in the colour, be it homes, neighbourhoods or offices. From rain water harvesting to energy-conserving appliances, everything can do its bit towards conserving the planet.

The concept can be extended to home interiors as well. Bio-degradable paints, eco-friendly tiles, recycled furniture... there are endless options when it comes to setting up a green home.

"The market for eco-friendly products for the home has rapidly grown over the last few years. People are more conscious of what they are buying and clearly prefer products with a 'green' story," says Ashish Taneja, CEO, Zolijns Furniture. With this in mind, Zolijns has partnered with Riva1920, a 90-year-old Italian furniture company that makes furniture using only wood from sustainable forests.

### More than wood

Dimple Kohli of Qboid Design House suggests buying products made of reclaimed wood or second-hand furniture.

"This is cost-effective and saves wood," says Dimple. "By changing the upholstery and polish of old furniture and tweaking the core design, you can get a brand new look." When buying wooden furniture, you will find most pieces come with ISI certification, and even plywood and laminated products are certified.

These products are often more expensive than their non-certified counterparts but make environmental sense.

Try moving away from wood and opting for products made of plastic or metal. "Metal or plastic furniture can be economical, indestructible, light-weight and multi-purpose," says Taneja.

There are a lot of innovative designs now and far better quality than before. At the same time, it is important to remember that the life span of these products is less than that of wooden pieces.

### House of bamboo

And it's not just furniture; everything from wall paper to ceilings



**SITTING PRETTY:** Eco-friendly furniture is one of the options when it comes to setting up a green home

can conform to the green way. "Bamboo is very multi-purpose, grows fast and is an eco-friendly material," says Kohli. "Nowadays, bamboo is used on ceilings, floorings, laminates and more."

And as for wall paper and paints, make sure the paper is fungus-free, so that it lasts longer; and go in for biodegradable paints, which are more environment-friendly and non-toxic.

Even when it comes to floor tiles, there are earth friendly options. "The tiles we make do not absorb any moisture from the atmosphere and do not exhume any gases during usage," says Alok Goel, CEO, Nitco Ltd.

"At our manufacturing plant, everything is energy-efficient; we utilise in-house industrial waste and recycle the water used in the

production process." So, not only are the products eco-friendly, even the companies making them are following eco-friendly practices.

The next time you go furniture shopping or plan to re-do the interiors of your home, check if the piece is eco-friendly and if the

wood is from sustainable forests. Get certificates and don't be afraid to ask questions. Make your home truly green.

