

Definition: **mulberry** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

Any member of the genus *Morus*, trees and shrubs that grow in tropical and temperate regions. They have simple leaves, and the male flowers are catkins, while the female flowers are borne in spikes. Several species are cultivated for their fleshy, edible fruits.

Summary Article: **mulberry**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

common name for the Moraceae, a family of deciduous or evergreen trees and shrubs, often climbing, mostly of pantropical distribution, and characterized by milky sap. Several genera bear edible fruit, e.g., *Morus*, (true mulberries), *Ficus* (the fig genus), and *Artocarpus*, which includes the breadfruit and related species. The related hemp family, whose plants do not contain latex, were formerly included in this family.

Common Species and Their Uses

The mulberry family is most important as the basis of the silkworm industry; silkworms feed on the leaves of the mulberries (genus *Morus*) and sometimes of the Osage orange (*Maclura pomifera*). The white mulberry (*M. alba*) has been cultivated in China since very early times. In the Middle Ages it began to replace the black mulberry (*M. nigra*), which had been grown by the Greeks and Romans and, from the 9th cent., by the people of N Europe for silkworm culture. In Greek legend the berries of the white mulberry turned red when its roots were bathed by the blood of the lovers Pyramis and Thisbe, who killed themselves. Both the white and the red mulberry (*M. rubra*, native to North America) have been cultivated in America since colonial times, but the lack of cheap hand labor prevented the establishment of a silkworm industry. Mulberry fruits are tender and juicy and resemble blackberries. In the South the fruit of *M. rubra* is made into wine and is considered a valuable agricultural and wildlife feed.

The Osage orange, also called bowwood because it was used by the Osage tribe to make bows, is a hardy tree native to the S central United States. Its fruit is used as a natural insect repellent. Cultivated widely, often as a hedge plant because of its spiny, impenetrable branches, it is a source of a flexible and durable wood and of a yellow-orange dye, from the root bark, that is similar to the more widely used fustic (*Maclura tinctoria*). The heartwood of fustic yields a yellowish or olive dye, also called fustic, that has been used chiefly for dyeing woollens; it has largely been replaced by synthetic aniline dyes. In its native habitat of Central and South America the fustic is also a timber tree.

Fiber plants of the mulberry family include the paper mulberry (*Broussonetia papyrifera*) and the upas tree (*Antiaris toxicaria*) of the East Asian tropics, where the bast fiber is utilized for rough fabrics and for paper, often after a crude retting process. The latex of the upas [Malay,=poison tree] contains a cardiac glycoside used for arrow poison; the similarly employed strychnine tree of the logania family is sometimes also called upas.

The breadfruit (*Artocarpus utilis*) is cultivated as a staple food plant in the Pacific tropics and in the West Indies, where it was introduced from Polynesia in the late 18th cent.; the *Bounty* was carrying breadfruit plants to Jamaica when the famous mutiny occurred. The compound, high-carbohydrate fruit has a taste when cooked that resembles that of fresh bread or cooked potatoes. The tree's wood,

fiber, and latex are also variously utilized locally. The important fig genus includes fruit trees, ornamentals (e.g., the rubber plant), and several species renowned in the religion and legends of India (e.g., the banyan and the bo tree).

Classification

The mulberry family is classified in the division Magnoliophyta, class Magnoliopsida, order Urticales.

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