

Acorus calamus



Family: Araceae

Local/common names:
Sweet flag, Baryan, Boi,
Vacha, Bach

Trade name: Calamus

Profile:

Acorus calamus is a semi-aquatic, perennial aromatic herb. It has medicinal uses for a wide variety of ailments. It has been an item of trade in many cultures for thousands of years. A continuing gradual decline of this species is taking place in the population of the northeastern Himalayas. Major threats identified are loss of habitat and over harvesting for medicine and trade. The status of the species is vulnerable in the eastern Himalayas, but the global status is not evaluated.

Habitat and ecology: It is found in damp, marshy places, near riverbeds, watercourses and lakes up to a height of 2600 m. Probably indigenous to India, *Acorus calamus* is now found across Europe, southern Russia, northern Asia Minor, Southern Siberia, China, Japan, Burma, Sri Lanka and the northern part of the United States of America. In India, it is found in Kinnaur, Kullu, Mandi, Shimla, Kangra, Sirmour and Chamba in Himachal Pradesh, Darjeeling, Sikkim, Manipur, Meghalaya and Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh.

Morphology: *Acorus calamus* is a semi-aquatic or marshy, perennial herb with indefinitely branched rhizomes, creeping in mud and having stout joints with large leaf scars. The rhizomes are cylindrical or somewhat compressed, about 1.5 cm in diameter, smooth, pinkish or pale green and are white and spongy within. The leaves are few in number, distichously alternate, forming erect tufts at the extremities of rhizomes.

Distinguishing features: The prominent leaf veins make the morphological distinction between the *Acorus* species. *Acorus calamus* has a single prominent mid-vein and then on both sides slightly raised secondary veins and many, fine, tertiary veins. This even makes it clearly distinct even from *Acorus americanus*.

Life cycle: The plant flowers and fruits during a span of about 5 months (from April-August).

Uses: *Calamus* has been used medicinally for a wide variety of ailments. The rhizomes are emetic in large doses and are stomachic and carminative in smaller doses. The plant is useful in bronchitis and remittent fever. It is a simple and useful remedy for flatulence, colic or dyspepsia and a pleasant adjunct to tonic or purgative medicines. The powdered roots are used as a vermifuge. The rootstock and leaves are used in the preparation of perfume and hair powder. It is used as a remedy for chronic diarrhoea. The rhizome is also used as an appetite stimulator, useful in the treatment of epilepsy, hysteria and memory loss. The dried rhizome of the plant constitutes the drug called, 'calamus of commerce'. In high doses, the plant is hallucinogenic. It is used for flavouring liquors. Due to the pleasant and sweet smell, the rhizomes are extensively used in the preparation of incense.

Market rate: It is available at the rate of Rs.100/- per kg in Delhi, whereas in Punjab, it is available at the rate of Rs.50/- per kg (as in March 2007).