

National Flower: Lotus

Botanical Name: *Nelumbo nucifera* Gaertn.

Common Names: Padam (Assamese); Komol, Padma (Bengali); Suriyakamal (Gujarati); Kamal (Hindi); Kamala, Tavare-gadde (Kannada); Pampos (Kashmir); Soh-lapudong (Khasi); Tamara (Malayalam); Thambal (Manipuri); Kamal (Marathi); Salukidba, Upalka, Kombalba (Mundari); Padam (Odiya); Kanwal, Pampos (Punjabi); Ambuja, Kamala, Padma, Pankaja (Sanskrit); Ambal, Tamarai (Tamil); Erra-tamara (Telugu); Nilufer (Urdu).

Family: Nelumbonaceae

Etymology: The genus name is derived from the Tamil word **Nelum**, which means blue, and the specific epithet '**nucifera**' derived from the Latin words, **nux** (= nut) and **fera** (= bearing), for nut-bearing.

Description: An aquatic perennial herb, rhizomatous, grows up to a height of ca. 150 cm and horizontal

spread of up to 3 m. Leaves peltate, orbicular, 60 – 90 cm, glabrous, glaucous, dark green above, pale beneath, covered with a network of microscopic hairs; veins radially extended; petioles very long, rise above the water, smooth or minutely prickled. Flower solitary, to 25 cm in diam., bisexual, entomophilous. Sepals elliptic or



***Nelumbo nucifera* Gaertn. – Habit**

Courtesy: K. Karthigeyan

ovate, 1.5 – 5 × 1 – 3.5 cm, concave, green or pinkish green. Petals ca. 25 (in single form) and ca. 110 (in double form), elliptic, obovate to spatulate, obtuse or subacute, 4 – 15 × 2 – 8 cm, concave, rose-pink or white. Stamens numerous. Receptacles 2 – 4 cm across, spongy. Carpels numerous, loosely embedded in cavities on flattened top of receptacle, 1-ovuled. Fruit a nut-like achene, oblong to ovoid.

Habitat: A range of shallow wetland habitats, including fresh water ponds, lakes, marshes, swamps and the backwaters of reservoirs.

Flowering & Fruiting: March – December (January).

Range of Distribution: It is native to Asia; from South and East Asia (Bhutan, China, Indonesia (Java), Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, New Guinea, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia (Far East), Sri Lanka and Thailand) to far eastern Russia and to N. Australia and America.

Economic Importance: Leaves are used for wrapping food and as plate. Flower is used as the source of lotus perfume. Dried flowers are used in preparation of fragrant herbal tea. Young leaves, petioles and flowers are eaten as vegetables. Tender seeds are edible.

Medicinal Uses: The plant has numerous medicinal properties. Roots help in removal of toxic wastes from body, and also helpful in reducing body heat. The roots and rhizomes are useful in treating small pox, throat complications, pigmentation problems in skin and diarrhoea. The cooked root is good for the stomach and the reproductive organs. Rhizome paste is applied in ringworm and other cutaneous affections. Stem helps in the healthy growth of the foetus. Leaf paste is applied to the body in fever and inflammatory skin conditions. Leaves and flowers are useful in many bleeding disorders. Flowers are prescribed to promote conception.

Ceremonial Uses: Flowers are used as offerings in temples. Fibre obtained from lotus plant is used for weaving special robes for Buddha images, and the flower is considered a symbol of fortune in Buddhism. Lotus flowers are essential part of Durga Puja in West Bengal.

Note: A postal stamp was issued by the Indian Postal Department to commemorate this flower.

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