

Chanothi Tree

Common names: Red Bead Tree, Coral Wood, Moti Chanothi Tree

Scientific name: *Adenanthera pavonina*



This medium-sized tree with its bipinnate leaves is easy to identify by the little red seeds that emerge from the pods and dot the pavement beneath the tree. These seeds are collected by children, used for the treatment of boils, and were once used by goldsmiths as weights (each seed weighs about 0.26 grams).

The tree has yellow flowers, while the pods are green and hang in coiled bunches. But it is the red seeds that are at the center of stories and legends about the tree. Krishna temples in Kerala always have a bowl full of these seeds. This stems from a story about a poor but devoted woman who visited the temple of Guruvayur. As she was unable to afford anything else, she collected and carried a pouch of red seeds. Unfortunately her visit coincided with a royal visit and in the hustle and bustle she was bumped and her seeds fell to the floor. Chaos broke out and an elephant charged around – nobody could understand what was happening till a voice was heard from the temple demanding, “Where is my devotee? Where is the gift she so lovingly put together?” It was only when the crowds apologized to the woman and helped her gather her seeds and offer them in the temple that normalcy returned.