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| **Avocado**  ***(Persea americana)***  The avocado, common to salads and Mexican dishes, is featured in a tale of savage revenge from the South American country of Guiana. In the forest, there lived a man Seriokai, http://bhort.bh.cornell.edu/conservatory/avocado.jpgwho was very fond of avocados, and he spent much of his time gathering them to eat. One day, when he was off doing this, a tapir came into his camp where his wife was alone doing chores. the tapir, a slick and sly creature, lured his wife into falling madly in the love with him.  The next day, when Seriokai again went to collect avocados, his wife went along, pretending to gather firewood. As Seriokai came down from an avocado tree, intent on descending, she used a rock to knock him down, severing one of his legs. Then she ran off with the tapir to a faraway place, taking Seriokai's basket of avocados with her.  A neighbor heard Seriokai calling for help and took him home, where he slowly healed. Using a wooden stump on his leg, he set out to find his wife and the wicked tapir. He found a trail of avocado trees growing in the forest, springing from the avocados which fell from the basket of fruits the wife took with her. He followed the trail, which led farther and farther from the center of the Earth, noticing that the trees became younger and younger. At last he came upon freshly dropped seeds, and knew that he was drawing near.  Finally he came to the edge of the world, where he saw the runaway couple. He shot an arrow at the tapir, which struck his eye. Howling with pain, the beast leaped over the edge. Following her love, the woman jumped as well. Seriokai followed, and chased them through the sky. He follows them to this day, for he became Orion, the wife is the Pleiades, and the wicked tapir is Hyades, with a bleeding eye. |

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| **Banana**  ***(Musa sp.)***          One of the most nourishing fruits known to man, the banana has been a life giving food in the tropics since ancient times. As a result, many different cultures have tales about http://bhort.bh.cornell.edu/conservatory/banana.jpgits origins and uses. According to the Burmese, when man was created, he looked and looked for good food for himself and his children. He came upon a beautiful, tall green tree with many fruits, being busily devoured by birds. seeing the birds eating the fruits, he knew that they must not be poisonous, so he shooed the creatures away and took the bananas to feed his family. Ever since, the Burmese have eaten the fruits of the banana, which they call hnget pyaw, "the birds told."          The Hawaiians, also fans of the fruit, which they call mai`a, tell a story that the brother of the goddess Pele brought the banana in his canoe to Hawaii from Tahiti. They also believe mai`a to be the body of Kanaloa, their god of healing. |

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| **Banyan Tree**  ***(Ficus indica)***           The Banyan Tree holds a sacred position in many eastern cultures. In India, mythology holds that there is a Banyan tree in heaven, under which Vishnu, one of the http://bhort.bh.cornell.edu/conservatory/banyan.jpgIndian deities, was born. Today, it is believed that Vishnu plays beneath at the foot of a great Banyan outside of Mount Govardhana, illuminating all that is nearby with his presence. The Banyan is considered the tree of seers and holy people, and as the Tree of Knowledge          There is a Banyan tree growing near Surat, on the river Nerbudda, which is reputed to be the oldest in all of India. Believe to house a go, it is never touched with metal or trimmed, and is over 3,000 years old (it is thought to have been visited by officers of Alexander the Great). It has a figure carved into its bark, which is painted red and presented with offerings by pilgrims.  Revered by Chinese Buddhists as well, it is believed in that religion that Buddha sits beneath a Banyan tree and faces East, where he is venerated by Brahma. |

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| **Canna**  ***(Canna indica)***          The Canna is believed by the Burmese to have sprung from Buddha's blood.  Legend has it that Dawadat, his cousin, was jealous that he did not have a following like Buddha's, http://bhort.bh.cornell.edu/conservatory/canna.jpgand decided to destroy him. One day, while Buddha was meditating at the bottom of a hill, Dawadat rolled a huge stone down the hillside to crush him. By a miracle, the rock broke into small, harmless pieces, but one of these cut Buddha's toe, which bled. When it fell to the ground, the blood turned to a brilliant and beautiful red flowered plant, which we know as Canna. In Burma it is called Bohdda Tharanat. |

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| **Cassia**  ***Cassia sp.***          A Chinese legend says that a Cassia tree grows at the middle of the moon. Because of http://bhort.bh.cornell.edu/conservatory/cassia.jpgthis, the moon is known as Kueilan, the disk of the Cassia. According to the story, a man from Si-Ho named Kang Wou found a genii and abused its powers. As punishment for the crimes he committed with the genii's magic, Kang Wou was sentenced to spend eternity attempting to cut down the Cassia on the moon. |

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| **Coffee**  ***(Coffea arabica)***          What would the morning be like without coffee? A favorite beverage of humans since early history, the coffee plant originated in the Middle East, where the Ethiopians have a http://bhort.bh.cornell.edu/conservatory/coffee.jpglegend about its discovery. A young boy named Kaldi was out in the hills one day minding his herd of goats, when he noticed that the animals, instead of grazing peacefully, were actively cavorting. Puzzled, he watched them for a time, and saw that they were eating bright red berries from a lovely, glossy green plant. Worried about their safety, he himself tried some of the beans, and was astonished at the vibrant, wide awake sensation that they produced.          That night, he took a few berries home with him to the mullah of his village, who thought their waking properties would be useful at evening religious services! Not only did they keep the congregation awake, the beans became a favorite of the people, and the rest is history. |

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| **Heath**          The heath plant has a place in much Germanic and Celtic lore. In the British Isles, a wonderful and much coveted heather mead was made by the Picts, who once dominated http://bhort.bh.cornell.edu/conservatory/heath.jpgthe territory. The secret recipe for this brew was known to only a small number of them. When the Picts were conquered by other Celtic tribes, the secret died with them.          According to tradition, after the war between the tribes, only two Picts who knew the secret recipe remained, a father and son. When interrogated for the recipe, the conquerors put the son to death, in an attempt to scare the father into revealing the desired information. He refused, allowing that he was glad that his son was gone, for the conquerors might have forced him, as a more gullible youngster, to reveal his secret, but he, the father, could never be forced to divulge.          In some versions of the tale, the father is killed for his insolence, in others, he is allowed to live for his face of bravery when confronted with the enemy. But in all of the tales, however, he takes his recipe to his grave, never allowing the barbarous conquerors to enjoy the heavenly brew of the Pictish warriors. |

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| **Holly**  ***Ilex sp.***          Holly is mostly widely known as a plant used to decorate for the winter holidays. Its association as such goes back to the time of the Romans. The Romans used holly, as an evergreen, to decorate their homes for the riotous fest of Saturnalia. Several centuries later, Roman Christians, who had followed this practice in their days before conversion, continued to decorate their homes with holly for the Christian winter holiday of Christmas. Over time, holly lost its Saturnalian associations and became a beacon of winter and of the Christmas season.          Through the years, holly has accumulated many other myths and legends centered around its Christmas associations. In England, holly is believed to house fairies and elves who come indoors to enjoy the holiday with humans. In other parts of Europe, holly is thought to repel witches and evil, and so is brought indoors to protect the Christmas festivities.          There is another custom attached to holly, quite different from its Christmas connections. In Northumbrian England, holly was traditionally used by young girls as a charm for revealing the identity of their future husbands. On Samhain (Halloween), Beltaine (Midsummer's Eve), Christmas Eve or New Year's Eve, three holly leaves were pinned, opposite the heart, to a young girls nightgown, and three pails of water were placed in her bedroom. She would then go to bed. She would first be awakened by terrible wails and screeching, later by the sound of a horse neighing. Following this, her future spouse would enter the room. If he was to be greatly in love with her, he would rearrange the pails of water. If not, he would leave the room unchanged. |

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| **Ivy**  ***(Hedera sp.)***          Ivy is not only the emblem of the prestigious American Ivy League schools, it is also http://bhort.bh.cornell.edu/conservatory/hedera1.jpgdeeply rooted (pardon the pun) in mythology. According to the Greeks, Bacchus had a son named Kissos, who, while playing with his father, died suddenly. Heartbroken, Bacchus tried to revive him to no avail. Taking pity on the unhappy father and dead child, Gaia, the goddess of Earth, changed the boy into ivy, which in Greek is named Kissos, after the child. Bacchus thereafter held sacred the ivy plant, and is most often depicted wearing a crown of its green leaves in Greek art.          A more romantic ivy legend comes from Cornish sources. In this tale, a beautiful maiden named Iseult was betrothed to a handsome and brave knight named Tristan. When he was slain, she was so brokenhearted that she died as well. The king, who was jealous of Tristan's hold on the love of Iseult, who the king fancied, ordered their graves to be placed far apart. From each of the graves, however, an ivy vine grew, and, over time, they met and joined in a true love knot in the sanctuary where the graves lay. This tale was immortalized in Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*. |

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| **Jasmine**  ***Stephanotis sp.***          The sweet scented Jasmine is often carried by brides in their bouquets, but few know the story behind this tradition. Jasmine was first introduced to Europe in 1699 by the Duke of Tuscany. Wishing to remain the only person who possessed the lovely plant, the Duke ordered that no cuttings be given away. His gardener, however, was very poor and had a beautiful sweetheart. For her birthday, having no other gift, he picked a sprig of the flowering Jasmine for her to wear. She planted the sprig in fertile Earth and it rooted.          In time, the plant grew large, and she was able to grow others from its cuttings, selling them to wealthy ladies and gentlemen who coveted its exotic fragrance and beauty. With the money gained from selling the plants, she and the gardener were able to marry, and lived happily ever after. In memory of this woman who used a gift of love to make a life of happiness for herself and her sweetheart, the jasmine is carried in bridal bouquets to this very day. |

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| **Lily**          The lily, though beautiful, has funereal connotations in many cultures, including the people of medieval Normandy, who told a tale of lost love and the lily flower. There was a very brave knight in Normandy, whose exploits were famous and who was known throughout the land. He had been offered the hand of several maids, each more lovely than the next, but he refused each, and lived alone, searching for the perfect maiden to be his wife.          A rather melancholy person, he spent many hours wandering in graveyards. One day, while on such a stroll, he saw a young woman, dressed in expensive and beautiful robes sitting on a tombstone. Taken with her beauty, he approached her and kissed her hand. At this, she smiled, and revealed that she was the woman for whom he had searched. Elated, the knight took her home to his castle, where they spent a year in happiness and joy.          At the end of the year, at Christmastime, they held a huge banquet and invited scores of knights and their ladies. It was a very festive occasion, with good food and drink and fine music. Towards the end of the feast, a minstrel with a voice more beautiful than all the others sang a series of songs, finishing with one about the loveliness of heaven and life after death.          At this, the wife became pale and wan, and dropped at her place. She slowly collapsed, and her husband, the knight, rushed to her side. He took her in his arms, only to find that instead of embracing his dying wife, he held a lily, whose petals slowly fell, one by one, to the floor. Heartbroken, he ran from the castle and the banquet, to the cold outdoors. As he knelt in his courtyard, snow began to fall: white lily petals from the sky. |

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| **Mango**  ***(Mangifera indica)***          Mango's sweet fruit is known to people the world over, and the Indian people have an interesting story to account for its origins. The daughter of the sun was a beautiful and http://bhort.bh.cornell.edu/conservatory/mango.jpgaccomplished girl, more lovely than any other girl on Earth. She was married to a powerful king on Earth, and they were very happy. A wicked enchantress was jealous of her happiness, and vowed to make her miserable. She chased the girl here and there, terrifying her with threats and horrible screeches.          To escape the evil woman, the daughter of the sun dove into a deep pool and became a lotus flower, delicate and lovely. Her husband, seeing the exotic and unusual flower in his water garden, was taken with its loveliness. Furious that her enemy was prized even as a flower, the enchantress sent flames to destroy the lotus.          From the ash of the burnt lotus there grew the mango. The king, though sorry for the loss of the lotus, found the mango flowers beautiful. When the plant set fruit, he eagerly awaited tasting it for the first time. As he went to pick the first of the mangoes, it fell from the tree at his feet, and a beautiful girl, the daughter of the sun, burst from its flesh. Recognizing his wife, the king rejoiced with happiness and took her back to her home to the palace, where he treasured her forever.          There is another romantic Indian tale associated with the mango. Kamadeva, cupid, carries five arrows with which he pierces the senses of his victims. A young girl, pining for love of a special man, gathered a lovely mango flower, which she gave to cupid and instructed him to place on the tip of one of his arrows. He did so, and was so pleased with the results that the mango flower dart became the arrow of love, and his favorite. |

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| **Peepul**  ***(Ficus religiosa)***          Called the Asvattha or Pippala by the Hindus, this tree is the Sacred Tree of Knowledge, or Bo Tree of the Buddhists. It is beneath a shady tree, they believe, that http://bhort.bh.cornell.edu/conservatory/ficusreligiosa.jpgPrince Gautama sat and meditated for seven years, arriving at the truths central to the Buddhist religion. Gautama repeatedly sought refuge with his thoughts beneath the tree, and as he withdrew further and further from the secular world of the palace in which he was prince, his mother increasingly worried about him. Wanting her son to return to a normal life, she demanded that the Bo Tree be destroyed.           Instead of shaking Buddha from his intellectual meditation, this drove him into extreme distress, and he fainted at the sight of his ravished tree. He was revived, and poured a libation of 100 jars of milk over the tree's shattered stem. He vowed that he should die if the tree did not rejuvenate, at which words it immediately began to grow vigorously until it regained its original size.  The Bodhdruma (Bo Tree) is held sacred throughout the Buddhist and Hindu world today, as it has been through history. |

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| **Pineapple**  ***(Ananas comesus)***          The wild pineapple is part of a rather macabre Peruvian legend. Supposedly, every http://bhort.bh.cornell.edu/conservatory/pineapple.jpgnight, the dead arise from their graves and walk the earth to eat the fruit of the wild pineapple, which is known in Peru as the Guabana or Guarabana. These ghostly goodies are purported to be sweet, melon-like, and shaped like pineapples. |

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| **Rosemary**  ***(Rosmarinus coronarius)***  The Italians have an unusual legend about the Rosemary plant.  A queen was out walking in her garden, crying and weeping over her inability to have children. she paused before a Rosemary bush which was covered with prolific shoots and new growth, and wished http://bhort.bh.cornell.edu/conservatory/rosuse.jpgthat she too might be as fruitful. Some time later, she gave birth to a small rosemary plant, which she watered and nurtured.  Playing a cruel joke, her nephew the king of Spain stole it, and watered it with goat's milk. When he was in his garden one day, playing a lovely tune on the flute, a gorgeous girl burst from the plant. He fell deeply in love with her beauty, and lamented when, a short time later, he was called to war.  Wishing no harm to come to the plant and its secret occupant, he ordered is gardener to give it all of the care possible, and to allow no one, not even himself, to make music near it. The gardener, however, forgot the king's order and was playing a tune on the flute one evening when the princess appeared again. Seeing her beauty, the kings sisters hit her and shamed her, and she disappeared.  At this, the plant wilted and drooped as though dying. The gardener, fearful at what he had done, ran for the palace and took refuge in a forest. Deep amongst the trees, he came upon a dragon, which revealed that the plant could be returned to vigor only if watered with dragon's blood. Hearing this, the gardener, though he had poor weapons, killed the dragon and took the precious blood to the plant, which revived. When he returned and found his princess there, healthy and lovely, the king praised his gardener and married the girl, the lovely Rosa Marina. |

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| **Shamrock**          It wouldn't be right to leave the shamrock out of a tour of plant legends. Today known as the symbol of the Irish people, the shamrock was, at one time, a Celtic lucky emblem based on their sun wheel. When Saint Patrick came to Ireland to convert the http://bhort.bh.cornell.edu/conservatory/shamrock.jpgDruidic peoples to Christianity, he was challenged by a chief to explain the Christian idea of the Trinity, three gods in one person. Thinking a moment, Patrick plucked a shamrock from the ground and pointed to its three leaves growing from one stem. Seeing the new doctrine in the old Celtic lucky symbol, the chief became a Christian, and the shamrock was on its way to legendary status. |