



Home Deity Worship Course

Tulasī devī - handbook



ISKCON Deity Worship Ministry

Tulasī devī - handbook

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1. Who is Tulasī devī?

The personality of Tulasī devī

4 Representations of Kṛṣṇa in this World

*bhāgavata, tulasī, gaṅgāya, bhakta-jane
caturdhā vigraha kṛṣṇa ei cāri sane*

Kṛṣṇa appears in this world in four forms—Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, Tulasī, Gaṅgā, and the devotees.

PURPORT: Śrī Kṛṣṇa manifests His own form in four representations in this world. Although if one abruptly sees these four representations one does not recognize them as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, these four representations related to the Supreme Lord are worshiped as manifestations of the Lord. The Vaiṣṇavas, Tulasī, Gaṅgā, and Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam are four manifestations of Kṛṣṇa.

— CB(M)21.81

Special Preference Given by the Lord

*mandāra-kunda-kurabotpala-campakārṇa-
punnāga-nāga-bakulāmbuja-pārijātāḥ
gandhe 'rcite tulasikābharaṇena tasyā
yasmiṁs tapaḥ sumanaso bahu mānayanti*

Although flowering plants like the mandāra, kunda, kurabaka, utpala, campaka, arṇa, punnāga, nāgakeśara, bakula, lily and pārijāta are full of transcendental fragrance, they are still conscious of the austerities performed by Tulasī, for Tulasī is given special preference by the Lord, who garlands Himself with Tulasī leaves.

PURPORT: The importance of Tulasī leaves is very clearly mentioned here. Tulasī plants and their leaves are very important in devotional service. Devotees are recommended to water the Tulasī tree every day and collect the



leaves to worship the Lord. One time an atheistic svāmī remarked, "What is the use of watering the Tulasī plant? It is better to water eggplant. By watering the eggplant one can get some fruits, but what is the use of watering the Tulasī?" These foolish creatures, unacquainted with devotional service, sometimes play havoc with the education of people in general.

The most important thing about the spiritual world is that there is no envy among the devotees there. This is true even among the flowers, which are all conscious of the greatness of Tulasī.

— ŚB (3.15.19)

Tulasī Etymology

*puṣpeṣu tulanapy-asya nāsīd devīṣu vā mune
pavitra-rūpa sarvasu tulasī sa ca kīrtitāḥ*

O great sage, this beautiful goddess is addressed as ‘Tulasī’— the Incomparable One since there is no flower or demigoddess who can match her in terms of purity.

— Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa (prakṛti khaṇḍa) 22.42

8 Names of Tulasī — Aṣṭa-nāma-stava from the Padma Purāṇa

*Vṛndā Vṛndāvanī Viśvapāvanī Viśvapūjitām
Puṣpasāra Nandinīsa Tulasīm Kṛṣṇa-jīvanīm*

Vṛndā— She has thousands and thousands of *sakhīs* (associate maidservants).

Vṛndāvanī — She never leaves Vṛndāvana.

Viśvapūjitā — The whole universe worships her.

Viśvapāvanī — She is the sanctifier of the whole world.

Puṣpasāra — She is the essence of all flowers.

Nandinī — She gives happiness to everyone.

Tulasī — She has an incomparable form.

Kṛṣṇa-jīvanī — She is the life and soul of Lord Kṛṣṇa.



Glories of Tulasī

Quoting from the Gautamīya-tantra, the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* states:

*tulasī-dala-mātreṇa
jalasya culukena vā
vikrīṇīte svam ātmānam
bhaktebhyo bhakta-vatsalaḥ*

"Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is very affectionate toward His devotees, sells Himself to a devotee who offers merely a Tulasī leaf and a palmful of water."

— ŚB (5.3.6) purport

2. Tulasī sevā

*dr̥ṣṭā spr̥ṣṭā tathā dhātā kirtitā namitā śrutā
ropitā sevitā nityam pūjitā tulasī śubhā
navadhā tulasīm devīm ye bhajanti dine dine
yuga koṭi sahasrāṇi te vasanti harer gr̥he*

"Tulasī is auspicious in all respects. Simply by seeing, simply by touching, simply by remembering, simply by praying to, simply by bowing before, simply by hearing about, simply by sowing, simply by offering water to, or simply by worshiping Tulasī there is always auspiciousness. Anyone who comes in touch with the Tulasī tree in the above-mentioned nine ways lives eternally in the Vaikuntha world."

— (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 9/126, 127 — Skanda Purāṇa, conversation between Lord Brahmā and Nārada Muni) cited by Bhaktivinode Ṭhākura in Bhaktyāloka, Chapter 10

Ways to Serve Tulasī

*snāne dāne tathā dhyāne prāśane keśavārcane
tulasī dahate pāpam ropāṇe kīrtane kalau*



In kaliyuga, Tulasī devī burns up all of a person's sins who bathes her, gives her in charity, meditates on her, eats her leaves, worships Lord Śrī Keśava with her, transplants her or sings her glories.

— (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 9.132 quoting Skanda Purāṇa, avanti khaṇḍa)

*trṇāni tulasī mūlat yāvanty apahiṇoti vai
tāvattīr brahma hatyā hi chinatty eva na saṁśayah*

Anybody who removes the straw or dirt from the root of Tulasī devī, as many as he has removed, that many sinful reactions of killing brāhmaṇas will be removed from him without a doubt.

— (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 9.165 quoting Bṛhan Nārādīya Purāṇa conversation between Yamarāja and Bhagīratha)

Pāda Sevanam: Benefits of serving Tulasī

Service to the Vaiṣṇava, Tulasī, Ganges and Yamunā are included in pāda-sevanam. All these processes of pāda-sevanam help one advance in spiritual life very quickly... In the same Skanda-Purāṇa, Revā-khaṇḍa, it is said that one who recites prayers to Tulasī or sows a Tulasī seed is also freed from all offenses (in deity worship).

— ŚB 7.5.23-24 purport

At Home

*yad gr̥he tulasī bhāti rakṣābhir jala-secanaiḥ
tad-gr̥he yama dūtāś ca dūrato varjayanti hi*

In any house where Tulasī Maharani is very carefully protected and watered, the messengers of Yamaraja give up that house from a distance.

— (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 9.145 quoting Padma Purāṇa, Kārtika Māhātmya)



Other Ways to Serve Tulasī

You may sew Tulasī Skirts for Tulasī (pot). Change the skirt for Tulasī in the temple daily. Do not allow flower garlands to remain on her for more than a day as wilted flowers attract insects.

Types of Tulasī

There are two types of Tulasī plants. One, grown in direct sunlight, develops purple leaves and stems, and dark purple to pink flowers-this is called a Kṛṣṇa Tulasī. The other, whose leaves and stems never turn purple and whose flowers are pure white, is called a Rāma Tulasī. Both are used for service to Viṣṇu tattvas.

There is also the robust Lakṣmī Tulasī or Tulasā (tree basil) used as a substitute when Tulasī is not available.



Tulasī leaf is very, very dear to Viṣṇu. All Viṣṇu-tattva Deities require profusely Tulasī leaves. Lord Viṣṇu likes garland of Tulasī leaves. Tulasī leaves mixed with sandalwood pulp and placed on the lotus feet of the Lord is the topmost worship. But we must be very careful that Tulasī leaves cannot be placed on the feet of anyone else except Lord Viṣṇu and His different forms. Tulasī leaves cannot be placed even on the lotus feet of Rādhārāṇī or on the lotus feet of the Spiritual Master. It is entirely reserved for being placed on the

lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa. We can place, however, Tulasī leaves in the hands of Rādhārāṇī for being placed on the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa.

— Letter to: Govinda Dāsī, Los Angeles, 7 April, 1970

Tulasī on the Lotus Feet of Kṛṣṇa

Kṛṣṇa worship begins from the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa. Nobody offers flowers and Tulasī on the face of Kṛṣṇa. They offer on the feet.

— Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 6.1.61, August 28, 1975, Vṛndāvana

Note: Tulasī leaves may be offered to the hand of śakti and jīva tattva, to be offered by them to Kṛṣṇa.

Do not use Tulasī leaves or mañjarīs to prepare tea. Try not to heat up or cook Tulasī. Do not grind Tulasī to be used as a paste.

Tulasī can be used under all circumstances

Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 7.291 states:

*ata eva nārādīye
varjyam paryuṣitam toyam varjyam paryuṣitam dalam
na varjyam tulasī-patram na varjyam jāhnavī-jalam*

Stale and worn-out flowers, or insipid water acquired earlier are unworthy for worshiping the Lord. However, Tulasī leaves and ganges water are considered fit despite being stale.

Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 9.191 quoting Padma Purāṇa (6.24.2) states:

*patram puṣpam phalam mūlam śākhā tvak skandha-samjñitam
tulasī sambhava sarva pāvanam mṛttikādikam*

The leaves, fruits, roots, branches, bark, trunk and soil around the root of Tulasī – all are considered pure and auspicious.



Usage of Tulasī Wood

It is mentioned in Agastya Samhitā that one who uses neck-beads and japa-beads made of Tulasī wood for sādhana receives imperishable benefits of devotional service.

*sannivedyaiva haraye tulasī kaṣṭa sambhavam
mālām paścāt svayam dhatte sa vai bhagavatottamaḥ*

Any person who wears a garland of Tulasī wood after placing it on the neck of Lord Hari, he is certainly the greatest devotee.

— Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 4/309 quoted from the Skanda Purāṇa

*yaḥ kuryāt tulasī kāṣṭhair akṣa mālām su-rūpiṇīm
kaṇṭha mālām ca yatnena kṛtaṁ tasyākṣayaṁ bhavet*

Any person who makes a beautiful japa mālā or neck beads out of Tulasī wood and uses them, if he does any worship to Lord Śrī Viṣṇu, all of his activities become unlimitedly fruitful.

— Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 9.199 quoting Skanda Purāṇa, conversation between Lord Brahmā and Nārada Muni

Neck-Beads Is To Devotees What Dog-Collar Is To A Dog

Somebody asked me, Svāmījī, "Why this Tulasī beads on your neck," or "your devotees' neck?" So I replied, "Just like a pet dog has got a collar, similarly, we are pet dogs of God, we have got this collar, and Yamarāja will understand that 'He is God's dog.' "[laughter]" 'He should not be shot down.' "So actually that is the position. Anyone... Then here there is a verse... There is a verse that "Don't go to the Vaiṣṇavas," the Yamadūtas are especially instructed.

— Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 6.1.38, December 20, 1970, Surat

Plucking Tulasī Leaves & Mañjarīs

One should be clean before touching or plucking Tulasī. The Vāyu Purāṇa states:



*asnātvā tulasīm chitvā ya pūjām kurute narah
so'parādhī bhavet satyaṁ tat sarvaṁ niṣphalaṁ bhavet*

A person who picks Tulasī leaves without first taking bath and then performs worship is an offender and whatever good activities he performs becomes useless.

— Hari-bhakti-vilasa 7.346 quoting Vāyu Purāṇa)

Take special care to avoid causing Śrīmatī Tulasī-devī any pain. If when picking Tulasī leaves one breaks the branches, Viṣṇu feels pain in His heart:

*pātrāṇām cayane vipra bhagna śākhā yadā bhavet
tadā hṛdi vyathā viṣṇor dīyate tulasī pateḥ
karatala trayam dattvā cinuyat tulasī dalam
yathā na kampate śākhā tulasya dvijasattama*

If when picking Tulasī leaves one breaks the branches, Viṣṇu feels pain in his heart. One should clap the hands three times before picking Tulasī and pick in such a way that the branches do not shake.

— Viṣṇu Smṛti

Pluck her leaves with your right hand while holding the branch in your left, carefully pick the Tulasī leaves or soft Tulasī- mañjarīs, along with their stems—one at a time, taking care not to break it while chanting the Tulasī-cayana-mantra:

*tulasī amṛta-janmāsi sadā tvam keśava-priyā
keśavārthaṁ cinomi tvām varadā bhava śobhane*

“O Tulasī of effulgent beauty, you were born from nectar, during the churning of the milk ocean. You are always very dear to Lord Keśava. Now, in order to worship Lord Keśava, I am collecting your leaves and manjarīs. Please bestow your benediction on me that my worship will obtain success.”

When finished, recite the kṣama-prārthana-mantra, begging her pardon:

*cayanodbhava-duḥkham ca yad hṛdi tava vartate
tat kṣamasva jagan-mātaḥ vṛndā-devī namo 'stu te*



O Tulasī-devī, I offer my respectful obeisances unto you. Kindly forgive me if I have caused you pain by picking your leaves and mañjarīs, O mother of the universe.

- Do not pluck Tulasī leaves in the morning before daylight or in the evening after dark.
- Do not wear shoes while plucking Tulasī to show respect to Tulasī.
- Do not pluck Tulasī save and except with the view to use her in Kṛṣṇa's service.
- Do not use scissors or a knife to cut the leaves from the plant.

Avoid Plucking Tulasī Leaves on Dvādaśī

Tulasī should not be plucked on Dvādaśī. The Viṣṇu Dharmottara says, *nac chindat tulasīm vipra dvādaśyam vaiṣṇavaḥ kvacit*, “Oh brāhmaṇas, a Vaiṣṇava never picks Tulasī leaves on Dvādaśī, (the day after Ekādaśī).”

*samkranty ādau ni siddho 'pi tulasyavacayaḥ smṛtau
param śrī viṣṇu bhaktāstu dvādaśyām eva neṣyate*

“It is generally forbidden to pluck Tulasī on Saṅkrānti, (Pūrṇimā, Amāvasyā, Dvādaśī, Sunday) etc., according to the strict rules of the Smṛtis, but the most important rule (according to Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī) which the Vaiṣṇava devotees should certainly follow is to not pluck Tulasī leaves on Dvādaśī.”

— (From Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 7.353)

You may pluck additional Tulasī leaves on Ekādaśī and save them for Dvādaśī.

If Tulasī is unavailable, one may touch Tulasī wood to the Lord's body as an offering of Tulasī. If wood is unavailable one should chant the name of Tulasī and perform the pūjā meditating on her presence. (i.e., *etat tulasī patram śrī kṛṣṇaya namaḥ*).

— HH Bhanu Swami (vesasraya vidhi)



3. Tulasī worship

Tulasī Worship

(from Pañcarātra Pradīpā, Chapter: The Worship of Tulasī-devī)

In the morning, after mangala-ārati (and preferably also in the evening, before sandhyā-ārati), all the assembled devotees should attend Tulasī worship and circumambulate Śrīmatī Tulasī-devī. First, we offer obeisances to Tulasī-devī with the Tulasī-praṇāma-mantra, chanted three times:

*(om) vṛndāyai tulasī-devyai priyāyai keśavasya ca
viṣṇu-bhakti-prade devī satya vatyai namo namaḥ*

I offer my repeated obeisances unto Vṛndā, Śrīmatī Tulasī-devī, who is very dear to Lord Keśava. O goddess, you bestow devotional service to Kṛṣṇa, and you possess the highest truth.

Then we sing the Tulasī-pūjā-kīrtana while one devotee offers āratī to Tulasī-devī with incense, a ghee lamp and flowers.

While offering the articles, the devotee offering Tulasī-ārati should stand on a mat and ring a bell with his left hand.

Each of the items may be distributed to the assembled devotees after they have been offered to Tulasī-devī.

Śrī Tulasī Praṇāma

*vṛndāyai tulasī-devyai
priyāyai keśavasya ca
viṣṇu-bhakti-prade devī
satya vatyai namo namaḥ*

4. Additional resources

The Tulasī devī handbook:

https://www.stephen-knapp.com/tulasi_devī_handbook.htm



Video on worshipping Vrnda devi

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BgyV6m9cVeY&list=PLuC93L-s8gGs_8oFYpIW0mRZX0vTQbP9F&index=110

How to make a skirt for Tulasī devī

<https://youtu.be/iUZ7rsU0U4s>

Letter to Govinda Dāsī

I am so very glad to learn that Śrīmatī Tulasī devī has favored you so much. If you can actually grow this Tulasī plant, and I am sure you will do it, then you must know it for certain that your devotion for Kṛṣṇa is testified. I was very much anxious to introduce this worship of Tulasī plant amongst our Society members, but it has not become successful till now, therefore, when I hear that you have got this opportunity, my pleasure does not have any bounds.

Please take care of the Tulasī plants in the following way. This is the best season for growing Tulasī plants. From 15th April to 15th June is the best season for growing this plant. Now I understand that the seedlings are coming out, so the whole spot if possible may be covered by some net because the seedling stage creepers being very delicate are sometimes eaten up by the sparrows, so we have to give a little protection from attack of the sparrows. All the devotees should pour water at least once in the morning before taking prasadam. The watering should not be very much large in quantity, but it should be poured just to keep the ground soft and moist. Sunlight also should be allowed. When the creepers are grown at least 7 inches high, then you can take them out from the planting soil and transplant them in a row in a different place. Then go on watering and they will grow like anything. I think this plant cannot grow in cold countries, but if the plants are dispatched from your place and if the devotees take care of the plant with a little care in a flower pot, then it may grow.

Tulasī leaf is very, very dear to Viṣṇu. All Viṣṇu-tattva Deities require profusely Tulasī leaves. Lord Viṣṇu likes garland of Tulasī leaves. Tulasī leaves mixed with sandalwood pulp and placed on the lotus feet of the Lord is



the topmost worship. But we must be very careful that Tulasī leaves cannot be placed on the feet of anyone else except Lord Viṣṇu and His different forms. Tulasī leaves cannot be placed even on the lotus feet of Rādhārāṇī or on the lotus feet of the Spiritual Master. It is entirely reserved for being placed on the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa. We can place, however, Tulasī leaves in the hands of Rādhārāṇī for being placed on the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, as you have seen on the Govinda Album.

I am giving you herewith three mantras for Tulasī devī as follows:

*vṛndāyai tulasī-devyai priyāyai keśavasya ca
viṣṇu-bhakti-prade devī satya vatyai namo namaḥ*

This is offering obeisances, bowing down (pañcāṅga praṇām). And when collecting leaves from the plant, the following mantra should be chanted:

*tulasī amṛta-janmāsi sadā tvam keśava-priya
keśavārthaṁ cinomi tvām varadā bhava śobhane*

Then the mantra for circumambulating the Tulasī tree.

*yāni kāni ca pāpāni brahma-hatyādikāni ca
tāni tāni praṇaśyanti pradakṣiṇaḥ pade pade*

So there are three mantras, one for bowing down, one for circumambulating, and one for collecting the leaves. The collecting of leaves should be done once in the morning for worshiping and for putting on the plates of foodstuff to be offered. On each bowl or plate there should be at least one leaf. So you follow and practice these Tulasī affairs and you try to distribute your experience to all the other centers, that will be a new chapter in the history of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness Movement...

Regarding installation of the Deities for which you are preparing, I wish to go there as soon as there are many Tulasī leaves grown. You are trying to grow mango very soon, but it will be better if you can grow soon the Tulasī leaves. This is more important than growing mangos. So you give your best attention for this purpose and as soon as you inform me that there is a regular bush of Tulasī plants, then I shall immediately start for Hawaii and install your Deities. I think this will satisfy you.



— Letter to: Govinda Dāsī, Los Angeles, 7 April, 1970

Letter to Vidya Dāsī

Following are a set of questions asked by Vidya Dāsī in a letter posted on October 25, 1976* to Śrīla Prabhupāda answered by him:

“My dear Vidya dāsī,

Please accept my blessings. I am in due receipt of your letter dated September 27, 1976.

If it is not possible for Tulasī to survive the winters when planted in the ground, then a suitable house should be provided for her. Even in the Canadian temples, which are in a much colder climate, they are keeping Tulasī nicely. Why should there be so much difficulty in Los Angeles, which has such a nice climate? Just do everything very carefully. Tulasī flourishes where there is love and devotion.

In answer to your questions:

1. Is each Tulasī a separate jiva soul or an expansion of one pure devotee?

A.: Tulasī is one devotee who appears wherever there is devotion to Kṛṣṇa.

2. Where does her spirit soul go when she leaves this body?

A.: Tulasī’s body is spiritual

3. Can we place moon-stone at the base of Tulasī devī? Can we place jewelry on the base of Tulasī?

A.: Yes, jewelry is all right.

4. When Tulasī is being cared for by householders in their homes, must two āratīs still be offered?

A.: If possible.



5. When Tulasī is being cared for by householders in their homes, may they use her leaves and mañjarīs on their home offerings or should they take them to the temple?

A.: Tulasī leaves should be offered to the Deity.

6. When Tulasī is being offered arati by the householders, must she have a ghee lamp?

A.: If possible.

7. Is it offensive to turn the baby Tulasīs back into the soil when they appear?

A.: Yes.

8. There are even questions concerning Tulasī's āratīs. We have always offered her incense, ghee lamp, and a flower. Is this correct?

A.: Yes.

9. In the manual, it states that Tulasī should not be pruned. Does this mean trimming the branches which no longer have leaves or life fluids flowing through them?

A.: You may cut the dead branches, but what is the necessity?

10. We were told you once spoke the “four regulative principles of Tulasī care” which will keep her from getting sick: (a) keep her moist; (b) keep her clean; (c) give her morning sunlight (at least); (d) give her two āratīs a day. Is this bona fide?

A.: I never said that.

11. May Tulasī be made into a tea after she has been offered?

A.: No

12. May devotees carve Tulasī wood for Deity paraphernalia?



A.: Yes

13. When Tulasī leaves her body and the body is too soft for carving beads, how should she be used? Should a small fire sacrifice be performed?

A.: Use the wood for beads as far as possible, the balance may be placed within the earth.

14. We have a letter from you requesting that no sprays be used on Tulasī-devī. May we use a spray of buttermilk and whole wheat flour dissolved in water which coats her leaves to keep spider mites from causing Tulasī to leave her body?

A.: I said no chemical sprays.

15. Does Tulasī sleep? Should she be left undisturbed after nightfall?

A.: Undisturbed means what?

16. Is it permissible to use scissors to cut her mañjarīs, and when transplanting, to use knives to loosen her from her pot?

A.: Use common sense and if you have none then consult with others.

17. Is it an offense to step on or across her shadow (or the shadow of any pure devotee)?

A.: No. Don't try to introduce something new. The most important thing is the love and devotion.

*The questions have been added from "A Transcendental Diary Volume 5, Chapter 3: Śrī Vṛndāvana Dhāma" by Hari Śauri Dāsa

