

Aleurites fordii

[Synonyms : *Vernicia fordii*]

TUNG-OIL TREE is an evergreen tree. Native from central Asia to Burma (often referred to today as Myanmar) but particularly south-western China, it has red veined, very palest mauve flowers.

It is also known as China wood-oil tree, *Tungträd* (Swedish), Tung tree, and Wood-oil tree. Oil (known as tung oil or Chinese wood oil) is extracted from the seeds.

Warning – milky sap, leaves and seeds are extremely poisonous. Symptoms can be delayed for several days or begin within half an hour. One seed can cause nausea, abdominal pain, dizziness, diarrhoea, gastroenteritis, vomiting and exhaustion after a few hours followed by shock, dehydration, respiratory depression (blueness of skin) heart irregularities and death. The sap can also cause dermatitis. Livestock, especially cattle, can be poisoned from eating the fruit.

Tung-oil tree's inedible seeds can be confused with edible Brazil nuts (*Bertholletia excelsa*). The soot from burning tung oil (which is obtained from the seeds of this and other closely related species) has always been an ingredient in India ink, a medium still used today by Chinese calligraphers. This tung oil has also been one of the traditional constituents of cans of paint. Despite this however the oil from this species is considered by some authorities to be of poorer quality than that yielded by relatives such as the candle nut oil tree (*Aleurites moluccana*) or the Japanese tung oil tree (*Aleurites cordata*). Boiled oil yields a waterproofing medium and this is used by commercial enterprises on wood, and paper. Continuing in commercial vein the oil is also used as a drier for cobalt, manganese, lead and tungate, and in paint, varnish, enamel and lacquer. The oil is used commercially in automobile brake linings, linoleum, tiles, pressed fibre boards and in printing ink too.

The remains left after oil extraction have also been turned to commercial advantage. Pressed into cakes they are used as fertilizer.

Tung oil appears to have attracted a new use in the West in modern times in the treatment of leprosy.