

*Bursera simaruba*

[Synonyms : *Bursera bonariensis*, *Bursera gummifera*, *Bursera gummifera* var. *pubescens*, *Bursera integerrima*, *Bursera subpubescens*, *Burseria gummifera*, *Elaphrium simaruba*, *Elaphrium subpubescens*, *Pistacia simaruba*, *Tapirira macrophylla*, *Terebinthus brownii*, *Terebinthus simaruba*]

**WEST INDIAN BIRCH** is a deciduous tree. Native to tropical America, from Venezuela through Mexico and the West Indies to the southern United States, it has many tiny, greenish-red flowers, with many stamens.

It is also known as American elemi, Birch gum, Budge gum, *Carana* (Venezuelan), *Carate* (Colombian, Panamanian), *Chaca* (Mexican), Cum bush, *Gommier blanc* (Haitian), *Gommier rouge* (Dominican), *Gomye-blan* (Creole), Gum bark, Gumbo-limbo, Gum tree, Incense tree, Lignaloe, Lin-a-loa, Naked man, *Palo chino* (Mexican), Torchwood, Turpentine tree, and West Indian elemi.

The exuded balsam resin is known as American elemi, Cachibok, Chibou, Elqueme, Gomart, Tacamahaca, or West Indian elemi. Oil is distilled from small pieces of old wood.

The Mayas (who lived in Guatemala, southern Mexico and parts of Belize from about 2000 BC-900 AD) and other American Indian tribes, are known to have used the resin as incense.

This balsam resin has also been used as a varnish to protect canoes and as an alternative to gum arabic (*Acacia senegal*) for mending broken china and glass.

The North American Seminole Indians used the white, yellowish-white or pale brown wood to make medicine bowls.

Some authorities note that the tree is cultivated widely as hedging.

The wood has been used for construction and for making boxes, crates and matches, as well as for the manufacture of plywood (especially in Mexico).

The oil is a commercial ingredient in perfumery, and is also used in medicines by the pharmaceutical industry.

Medicinally, in the Caribbean the bark resin has been employed as a plaster when tending internal bruises, and the resin has also been used as a purgative, and in the treatment of fluid retention, fevers generally, dysentery and yellow fever.