

Diospyros ebenum

[Synonyms : *Diospyros glaberrima*, *Diospyros hebecarpa*]

EBONY is an evergreen or deciduous tree. Native to India and Sri Lanka it has fragrant, white flowers.

It is also known as *Abnus* (Hindi), *Abnush* (Nepalese), Black ebony, Black sapote, Ceylon ebony, Ceylon persimmon, *Chëmoe ebenovoe derevo* (Russian), *Diospiro ebona* (Esperanto), *Diosupirosu ebumu* (Japanese), East Indian ebony, *Ebano* (Spanish), *Ébène* (French), *Ébènier* (French), *Ébènier de Ceylan* (French), *Ébènier de Maurice* (French), *Ebenuz* (Spanish), Ebony persimmon, *Echter Ebenholzbaum* (German), *Karu* (Malayalam), Macassar ebony, Mauritius ebony, *Nallavalludu* (Telugu), Sapote negro, *Tseilonskoe ebenovoe derevo* (Russian), *Tumbi* (Tamil), and *Wu mu* (Chinese); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of blackness (tree).

The flowers open at dusk and fall the following morning.

Ebenum means ‘ebony-black or black’.

Some authorities muse on the initial development of a trade in ebony wood and note that while the wood is not of dramatic importance for construction it seems to have had an artistic appeal for many, many centuries. According to records there are those authorities who have reported that the ancient Egyptians imported ebony from India and used this wood to make some of the funerary objects archaeologists have discovered in royal tombs. (Then there are others who believe that actually the ‘ebony’ used was often imported african blackwood, *Dalbergia melanoxylon*. Both are heavy and very hard and both have black heartwood.) Early on ebony (the wood) found its way to the Near East both directly from India and via the ancient Egyptians, and in time it even ended up in China. And from the Near East, until the Portuguese were able to establish alternative trade routes by sea around the Cape of Good Hope, the wood eventually and gradually progressed into Europe.

Hundreds of years ago local belief held that ebony provided an antidote for poison and Indian rulers used drinking cups made of the wood.

Ebony wood, which comes from several related species, has been prized for centuries (and still is) for inlay work and cabinetmaking, the black keys on pianos and organs, and knife handles. It has been/is also used for chessmen, and opium pipes.