

Dracaena draco

[Synonyms : *Asparagus draco*, *Draco draco*, *Draco dragonalis*]

DRAGONTREE is an evergreen tree. Native to the Canary Islands it has tiny greenish-tinged, white flowers.

It is also known as Canarian dragon tree, Canary Island dragon tree, *Dorasena dorako* (Japanese), *Dracena de las islas Macaronésicas* (Spanish), *Dracéna obyčejná* (Slovak), *Drachenbaum* (German), *Dračinec dračí* (Czech), *Drageblodstræ* (Danish), *Drago* (Canary Island), *Drago común* (Canary Island), *Drago de Canarias* (Spanish), *Dragoeiro* (Portuguese), Dragon blood tree, *Dragonnier* (French), *Dragonnier commun* (French), *Dragonnier des Canaries* (French), *Dragonnier des îles Canaries* (French), Dragon's blood, *Drakblodsträd* (Swedish), *Drakdraceno* (Esperanto), *Drakonovo derevo* (Russian), *Dratsena drakon* (Russian), *Dratsena kanarskaia* (Russian), *Long xue shu* (Chinese), and Tear dragon's blood.

Resin is collected from cracks in the trunk. The wood is spongy and fibrous and does not form annual rings.

The tree is considered to be an endangered species in the wild.

Draco is derived from Greek *dracont*- (dragon) component.

In the 1960s dendrologists were beginning to note that it is extremely difficult to assess the age of dragontrees with any reliability. By 1971 authorities were debating whether any of this species existed any more that were more than about 400 years old. It is thus wise to view what have almost become 'standard' age declarations in many records with some caution. On that basis this tree (whose shape is believed by many to have been little different 60 million years ago to that of today) has been named by some authorities as one of the oldest living representatives of the vegetable kingdom. One tree which in 1868 was blown down in a storm was 70 ft. high and had a 45 ft. diameter girth when it died – and was alleged at that time to be over 6,000 years old. This last is an example of debated age claims.

Although the tree grows extremely slowly its bushy shape is a familiar sight in the Canary Islands where it is often cultivated as a succulent ornamental pot plant in both private and hotel gardens.

The Guanches in the Canary Islands revered the dragontree and used the resin from its trunk for mummification rituals.

The resin (or dried sap), sometimes referred to as 'dragon's blood', is used on a commercial basis today as pigment by the varnish and pharmaceutical industries (the latter for plasters). It has been employed for staining marble, and has also been an ingredient in medicines. By the 18th Century Italian violin-makers were using it for varnishing their instruments, and more recently the resin was among the materials that were used to protect zinc plates from acid during photo-engraving processes. Today it also provides an ingredient in some furniture polishes which give a very hard shiny finish.