

Haematoxylum campechianum

[Synonyms : *Cymbosepalum baronii*, *Haematoxylon pechianum*, *Haematoxylum pechianum*]

LOGWOOD is a spiny shrub or tree. Native to Honduras and Mexico it has small sweetly scented, yellow flowers with protruding stamens.

It is also known as *Blauholz* (German), Blood-tree, Bloodwood, Bloodwood tree, *Bokkan* (Bengali), Campeachy wood, Campeche, *Campêche* (French), *Campecheholz* (German), Campeche wood, Compeachy wood, *Gabbi* (Telugu), *Kampeĉo* (Esperanto), *Kampèsh* (Creole), and Peachwood.

The flowers are attractive to bees.

11 year-old trees are felled. Dye is extracted from fermented heartwood (which is dark, purplish-brown with a greenish iridescence) and roots. Unfermented heartwood is used medicinally.

Warning – used internally the heartwood can colour urine and stools blood red. It is poisonous for some animals.

Campechianum means ‘of or from Campeche, the name of both a Mexican state and that state’s capital city’.

The Spanish began a trade in the hard coarse wood (for its dyeing qualities) in Europe in the 16th Century. Its value in European markets is indicated in the records that note there was a period when Spanish ships importing logwood to that Continent had to maintain continuous vigilance in order to outwit pirates (some of them British) who were liable to attack them for their cargo. But it is also noted by historians that expertise was required in processing this wood in order to obtain a long-lasting dye. Initially this skill must have been in particularly short supply in Britain as in the reign of Elizabeth I (1533-1603) use of the dye there was actually forbidden because the resulting colour seemed to have so little permanency. Over time however this situation was to change and by the early 1800s logwood was as familiar in Britain as elsewhere on the European mainland.

The fermented heartwood (preferably young) and the roots are a source of a fast crimson, dark blue or purple dye (black if iron salts are added) used on wool. It was also employed for dyeing silk in Mexico until the 1960s. The dye was particularly sought after in Europe for blackening ladies’ hats until synthetic alternatives superseded it.

Logwood has been cultivated successfully as hedging, and the flowers are a source of honey that is held to be of particularly high quality.

Today the dye is still used commercially for wool and silk in a microscopic staining technique, as well as in ink. The wood is used for making furniture.

Medicinally, the heartwood used to be recommended for the treatment of diarrhoea and dysentery.