

*Liquidambar orientalis*

[Synonyms : *Liquidambar imberbe*, *Styrax liquidus*, *Styrax praeparatus*]

**LEVANT STORAX** is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to south-eastern Turkey it has greenish-white flowers and leaves that turn orange in Autumn.

It is also known as *Ambroň východní* (Czech), *Asht-loban* (Hindi), Balm of Gilead, *Duk-hamel-Daru* (Arabic), *Estoraque* (Spanish), Flussiger amber, *Idän-ambrapuu* (Finnish), *Likvidambaro orienta* (Esperanto), Liquidambar (English, French, Italian), Liquid storax, *Lubni* (Arabic), *Meahsayelah* (Arabic), *Neri-arishippal* (Tamil), *Orientalischer Amberbaum* (German), Oriental storax, Oriental sweet gum, Prepared storax, Rosemalloes, *Silarasa* (Bengali, Hindi), *Silhaka* (Sanskrit), *Storace* (Italian), Storax (English, French, German), *Storaxbaum* (German), and *Styraciflue* (French).

The bark is beaten in Spring and the resin collects in the inner bark for harvesting in Autumn. The gum known as ‘balm’, ‘Levant storax’ or ‘Levant styrax’ is extracted with boiling water and the sticky, greyish liquid obtained after purification turns to a yellowish-brown colour. It has a hyacinth-like smell and a burning, sharply pungent, aromatic taste.

*Orientalis* means ‘of or from the East’.

This is one of the several plants that is held by some to be the ‘balm of Gilead’ referred to in the *Bible*.

Liquid storax is still used today as a scent in oriental-type perfumes, as a fixative for them, (especially in floral scents), and is used commercially for scenting soap. (While centuries ago it was also used in the mummification process.)

Locally the bark (and wood) is burnt as incense to mask unpleasant smells from poor sanitation. Medicinally, the balsam was recommended for treating diphtheria, catarrh, gonorrhoea and various skin diseases such as ringworm or scabies. Today it can still be used for coughs and colds, and it is also an ingredient in preparations made for treating wounds and ulcers.

Today the gum is used by the pharmaceutical industry for cough, cold, wound and ulcer remedies and it is a primary ingredient in a traditional remedy, Friar’s Balsam.