

Liquidambar styraciflua

[Synonyms : *Liquidambar barbata*, *Liquidambar gummifera*, *Liquidambar macrophylla*,
Liquidambar styraciflua var. *mexicana*]

AMERICAN STORAX is a deciduous tree. Native to the eastern and southern North America it has greenish-yellow flowers and leaves that can turn crimson, gold, yellow and scarlet in the Autumn.

It is also known as *Ahornblättriger Amberbaum* (German), Alligator-tree, Alligatorwood, Ambarwood, *Amberbaum* (German), *Ambroň západní* (Czech), American mahogany, American red-gum, American sweet gum, Bilsted, Blisted, Californian red gum, Common sweet gum, Copalm, Gum storax, Delta redgum, Figured gum, Gum, Gum tree, Gumwood, Hazel, Hazel pine, Hazelwood, Incense tree, *Lännenambrapuu* (Finnish), *Likvidambaro storaka* (Esperanto), Liquidambar, Liquidamber, Liquid storax, Mulberry, North American sweet gum, Opossum tree, Plain redgum, Quartered redgum, Red gum, Sapgum, Sapwood hazel pine, Satin walnut, Satinwood, Splint sapgum, Splinted sapgum, Starleaf gum, Storax tree, Styra, Sweet gum, Sycamore gum, and White gum.

The bark is cut to release a resinous gum (or balsam known as ‘copalm’ or ‘copalm balsam’) that is used medicinally.

Styraciflua means ‘flowing with gum’.

Although it is known that the Cherokee North American Indians used the hardened gum like chewing gum – and included the bark as an ingredient in a tea – the plant’s main claim to fame among most North American tribes seems to have rested on its medicinal qualities. It was used in a veterinary capacity by the Rappahannock for treating distemper in their dogs – and in human medicine they and the Cherokee both took it to ease diarrhoea. The Cherokee also prescribed it as a sedative and for some period problems, and the Houma used it externally for worms. Both Cherokee and Choctaw Indians applied it to wounds.

The balsam is used on a commercial basis today as an ingredient in oriental-type perfumes and for scenting soap.

The heavy red-tinged, brown wood has been used to make railway sleepers and has also been burnt as fuel. Today it is used commercially for building, interior finishing, veneering and pulp, as well as for making furniture.

Medicinally, the extracted balsam is used in cough pastilles, as a fumigant and for treating skin diseases.