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Myroxylon balsamum

[Synonyms : *Myrospermum toluiferum*, *Myroxylon balsamum* var. *balsamum*, *Myroxylon balsamum* var. *punctatum*, *Myroxylon punctatum*, *Myroxylon toluiferum*, *Toluifera balsamum*]

BALSAM OF TOLU is a tree. It is native to tropical America (particularly Colombia).

It is also known as *Balsambaum* (German), Balsam tree, *Cabriuva vermelha* (Brazilian), *Cedro chino* (Mexican), *Chirraca* (Costa Rican), *Estoraque* (Peruvian), *Inciense* (Argentine), *Nabal* (Mexican), *Quina* (Argentine), *Sandalo* (Costa Rican), Santos mahogany, *Tache* (Colombian), *Tolu* (Colombian), and Tolu balsam.

The vanilla-smelling resin is collected (primarily in El Salvador) by making v-shaped cuts in the bark from which viscous yellowish-brown resin oozes out and this is collected in appropriately positioned cups.

Balsamum is derived from Latin *balsamum* (sweet-smelling balsam gum) meaning ‘balsam-bearing, balsamic or like balsam’.

Today Tolu referred to in the common name is known in Colombia as *Santiago de Tolu*.

The fragrant resin yields a balsam that is used as an ingredient in perfumes.

The reddish-brown wood has provided an alternative for mahogany (*Swietenia mahagoni*). It has been used for turning and for making railway sleepers, flooring, building interiors and furniture.

The resin is used today by the pharmaceutical industry eg. as an ingredient in the now long familiar remedy, Friar’s Balsam.