

Myroxylon balsamum var. *pereirae*

[Synonyms : *Myrospermum pereirae*, *Myrospermum sonsonatense*, *Myroxylon balsamum* var. *pareirae*, *Myroxylon pereirae*, *Myroxylon toluiferum*, *Toluijera balsamum*, *Toluijera balsamum* var. *pereirae*, *Toluijera pereirae*, *Toluijerum balsamum*]

BALSAM OF PERU is an evergreen tree. Native to Middle America (particularly the coastal forests of El Salvador known as the Balsam Coast), it has strongly fragrant flowers.

It is also known as *Balsamträd* (Swedish), *Perunpalsami* (Finnish), and Peruvian balsam.

The flowers are short-lived.

Resin is tapped from the bark of 5-6 years old trees (for about 30 years). The bark is beaten and scorched, after which an oily and treacly, fragrant, dark brown to black fluid (balsam) exudes and is soaked up with rags. The rags are boiled and the balsam (which is produced in different grades) separates to the bottom.

Warning – the balsam as an ingredient can sometimes cause allergic reactions.

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

Resin from balsam of Peru is sometimes used as chewing gum.

The mahogany-like heavy, pale straw coloured wood has been (and still is) used as an alternative for mahogany (*Swietenia mahagoni*) not least for making furniture.

The balsam is used commercially today in cosmetics and toiletries (particularly soap) and it is also used by the perfumery industry as a fixative.

Medicinally, the resin is used particularly locally for treating colds, as well as providing an antiseptic and disinfectant. Today the balsam is used in proprietary medicines (particularly cough syrups, antiseptics, disinfectants and ointments).