

*Pinus*

*Pinaceae*

*Pinus* is a classical Latin name for ‘pine, or specifically stone pine (*Pinus pinea*) or white pine (*Pinus strobus*)’.

The Cybele cult spread from Phrygia (today’s Turkey) to Greece in 5 BC and the ancient Greeks ultimately merged this nature goddess with their mother of Zeus, Rhea. One version of the legends associated with Cybele describes how after falling in love with Attis, a young shepherd, she makes him vow to a life of chastity. Unfortunately he breaks his promise and when Cybele strikes him in frenzied hysteria he castrates himself. After he recovers he decides to commit suicide but as he is about to do so Cybele transforms him into a tree that would be ever green – a pine or fir tree. About 200 years later the robust Cybele cult reached the Romans and pine trees came to be dedicated to many Greek and Roman gods.

The Greeks added pine cones to their wine vats which would have given the wine a resinous flavouring and such a taste still lingers today in the *retsina* of modern Greece.

Many of the species have been tapped commercially for their gum. When distilled this yields various chemicals and drugs as well as turpentine, rosin, pitch and tar. Primarily the tar was applied to wooden keels and decking until it was superseded by cheaper synthetic alternatives. The pitch has been used for waterproofing and in wood preservatives. While the rosin has been used to make sealing wax and varnishes, apart from being applied to violin bows. The pharmaceutical industry has been able to use some of the drugs and chemicals in for instance cough medicines for humans and bronchitic remedies used in veterinary medicine. Apparently turpentine derivatives have also been valued by perfumery and aroma laboratories for the production of a surprisingly wide range of smells or flavours suggestive of for example citrus (*Citrus*), cinnamon (*Cinnamomum verum*), liquorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*), lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*) and spearmint (*Mentha spicata*) – and it seems a menthol from the turpentine stable is commonly added to cosmetics, toiletry products and cigarettes.