

*Pinus halepensis*

[Synonyms : *Pinus alepensis*, *Pinus maritima*, *Pinus pityusa*]

**ALEPPO PINE** is an evergreen tree. Native to the Mediterranean (including Israel) it has both scale-like and sparse needle-like leaves, and hanging, glossy reddish-brown cones.

It is also known as *Aleppoföhre* (German), *Aleppokiefer* (German), *Borovice alepská* (Czech), *Borovice halepská* (Czech), Jerusalem pine, *Pin blanc* (French), *Pin d'Alep* (French), *Pino* (Spanish), *Pino d'Aleppo* (Italian), *Sanaubar* (Arabic), and *Strandkiefer* (German).

In Spring stamens explode to fill the air with grains of yellow pollen some of which are carried by air currents and wind to the vicinity of the higher young female cones. Three years later the lower older cones open to empty their seeds and these too are dispersed by wind.

Aleppo pine has been declared a noxious weed in South Australia, while in South Africa the tree has been declared an alien invading plant and its cultivation there is only allowed for commercial purposes in specified areas or reserves.

*Halepensis* means 'of or from Aleppo, Syria'.

Aleppo pine was sacred to the Greek sea god, Poseidon, as well as to Cybele, Attis and Pan.

Apparently the ancient Greeks applied pitch to scabs and boils on cattle.

Some authorities suggest that this tree could be the 'fir tree' referred to in the Old Testament of the *Bible*.

The trees have long been tapped for their resin which has offered a valuable commodity for Greece and Algeria. Originally added in ancient times to wine to prevent it going sour, the resin has provided the flavouring for retsina drunk still today – and it has been distilled for turpentine (known as Greek turpentine). The resin is said to have been used in ancient Egypt too for embalming the dead. Thickened resin makes a pitch which has had many varied applications from it once being smeared on wine jar corks to more recent examples such as the preservation of wood or an ingredient in sheep-wash.

Bark has been used for tanning.

The wood has been respected for thousands of years. Ancient Greeks used it for shipbuilding (their triremes were made from it) and large mallets. In more recent times it has been valued for general construction and housebuilding, has been made into posts and packing cases, and has also been burnt as fuel.

The tree's rapid growth and drought resistance has contributed to its popularity as an ornamental tree in the Mediterranean and made it invaluable in some reforestation programmes, notably Moroccan. It has been successfully cultivated in plantations since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century as can be seen on hillsides in Israel threatened by soil erosion, while in Australia (where in some areas it has been declared a noxious weed) Aleppo pine has been grown to provide shelter belts.

Medicinally, pitch was once used to heal ulcers and carbuncles and other parts of the tree were co-opted in remedies for other conditions, including toothache.