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Pistacia lentiscus

MASTIC is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native to the Mediterranean (particularly Greece, Turkey and Cyprus) it has very small, dull reddish-green flowers.

It is also known as *Arbre-au-mastic* (French), *Aroeira* (Portuguese), *Cornocapro* (Italian), *Damia sakiz ag* (Turkish), *Deru* (Maltese), Gum mastic, *Kinnah* (Persian), *Kinnoli* (Persian), *Kinuak* (Arabic), *Kundar-rumi* (Indian), *Lentisc*, *Lentisco* (Italian, Portuguese, Spanish), *Lentisk*, *Lentiske* (German), *Lentisko* (Esperanto), *Lentisque* (French), *Manna del Libano* (Italian), *Mastagi* (Urdu), *Mastaki* (Malay), *Mastich*, *Mastichiá* (Greek), *Mastic pistachia*, *Mastic tree*, *Mastiksipistaasi* (Finnish), *Mastixbaum* (German), *Mastixstrauch* (German), *Pistacia*, *Pistachierlentisque* (French), *Pistachio sondo* (Italian), *Řečík lentišek* (Czech), *Rumi-mastaka* (Arabic), *Rumi-mastaki* (Hindi), *Rumi-mastungi* (Bengali), *Rumimostika* (Indian), *Skinári* (Greek), *Skinos* (Greek), *Sweet assa*, and *Uluk-bagh-dame* (Arabic).

The flowers are pollinated by wind.

Known as ‘mastic’ the resin, tapped in the Spring, has a pleasant turpentine-like smell and a mild resinous taste.

Lentiscus is an ancient Latin name for *Pistacia*.

Mastic was used by the ancient Egyptians for embalming, and since at least 300 BC has been chewed by the Greeks (partly as a breath freshener) as well as by many other peoples of the Middle East and the Orient. Although it can be an ingredient in commercial breath freshening preparations today, it can still be found raw in the Middle Eastern and Indian bazaars where women purchase it for chewing as of old.

Mastic has been acclaimed as an aphrodisiac, particularly by Moslems. In India it was mixed with salep (a starch obtained from some orchid tubers), and in Malaysia it was combined with honey, opium (*Papaver somniferum*), and other flavourings. Today the resin is used in Turkey to make both a sweetmeat known as *masticha* and a liqueur called *mastiche* that represents centuries of local tradition.

As an oil it has been used in the past to sweeten cosmetic preparations and it has been an ingredient in both soap and artists’ varnishes. It was also used as a lamp oil. At the turn of the 20th and 21st Centuries the resin is used in divers ways including indentistry cement, and varnishes. It is used by antique restorers and the photographic industry, and for giving a varnish coating to works of art and to metals. Perhaps not least it is used by actors for securing their false beards

Its leaves, which have been used for tanning, yield a yellow silk dye.

The hard, veined wood is used for cabinetwork and joinery, and is made into charcoal.

The tree has been cultivated in England since 1664. The Canary Islands are part of its native habitat and on Gran Canaria it is a familiar sight around Monte Lentiscal which is actually said to be named after the plant.

Medicinally, particularly in the East it has been used to treat children’s diarrhoea. In the West its primary function seems to have been in dentistry.