

Pogostemon cablin

[Synonyms : *Mentha cablin*, *Pogostemon javanicus*, *Pogostemon patchouli*, *Pogostemon patchouli* var. *suavis*, *Pogostemon patchouly*, *Pogostemon patchouly* var. *suavis*]

PATCHOULI (English, French, German, Italian, Swedish) is a shrub. Native to south-eastern Asia it has small sometimes purple marked, whitish flowers.

It is also known as *Dilem pinang* (Malay), *Indisches Patchouli* (German), *Indrannanes* (Malay), *Kadirpachai* (Tamil), *Pacciuli* (Italian), *Pacholi* (Hindi), *Patcha* (Indian), *Patchapat* (Bengali), *Patchoui* (French), *Patchoulistrauch* (German), *Patchouly* (English, German), *Patchoulypflanze* (German), *Pate papâlagi* (Samoan), *Patsuli* (Finnish), *Puchapat*, and *Tefarik* (Turkish).

The leaves and young shoots are collected then dried, baled and subjected to steam distillation to obtain a greenish-yellow essence with a goat-like smell (this smell alters when combined with other ingredients).

Warning – the plant is said to be able to cause insomnia, nervous attacks and loss of appetite. The common name Patchouli is derived from Tamil words *patch* and *ilai* meaning respectively ‘green’ and ‘leaf’.

Traditionally genuine Indian carpets, linen, shawls and inks used to be scented with the strong and distinctive perfume (that interestingly improves with age) as an identification of the material’s source. (Authorities have noted that in the early 19th Century when Scottish mills in north-western Europe were weaving shawls of Indian design these were only acceptable to the export market when they bore this patchouli scent.)

The perfume is capable of masking the smell of perspiration and for this reason has long been used in bath water in the Middle East.

As an insect repellent the leaves have been placed inside books.

Today the oil is used commercially as a fixative in cosmetic preparations including soap, incense and hair tonics. In perfumery it is used for oriental scents and it also offers a tobacco flavouring.