

Quercus infectoria

[Synonyms : *Gallae ceruleae*, *Quercus lusitanica*, *Quercus lusitanica* var. *infectoria*]

ALEPPO OAK is a semi-evergreen shrub or tree. Native to the eastern Mediterranean it has spiny, leaves and long acorns in short-scaled shallow cups.

It is also known as Aleppo gall, Blue gall, *Dub hálkový* (Czech), Gall oak, Infectoria oak, Levant gall, *Majuphal* (Bengali, Hindi, Sanskrit), *Mashikkay* (Malayalam), *Māzi* (Arabic, Kurdish), *Māzū* (Kurdish), Mecca gall, Nutgall, Oak apple, Oak gall, Turkey gall, and Turkish gall.

The excrescences that appear on it grow from punctures made by the female gall-wasp as she lays her eggs in young twig bark. After the larvae have hatched they secrete a fluid as they feed on plant tissues and this stimulates the formation of the gall. The larva is surrounded by the gall until maturity at which time it bores its way out. The gall is less than 1 in. wide, nearly round, and a dark bluish-green or olive green in colour outside and yellowish or brown inside (before the insect has escaped) when they are richest in tannin and considered to be at their best. Afterwards when a hole in the side is evident, they are spongy, lighter in weight and pale yellowish-brown. Galls have a very astringent and slightly acid initial taste and a sweetish after-taste.

Infectoria is derived from Latin *inficio* (tinge, dye stain, colour) meaning ‘dyed or coloured’. Those galls collected in Aleppo (Syria) particularly are believed by many to be the Sodom or Dead Sea Apples described as ‘pleasant on the eye and bitter to the taste’.

The galls were traded in the eastern Mediterranean over 2,000 years ago. The Roman supply is believed to have come primarily from Asia Minor. Arab traders included the galls among the many commodities carried on their caravans and through them oak galls became known in India and other countries in south-eastern Asia. The Arabs also introduced them to China during the T’ang dynasty (618-907).

In the 17th Century women used the perforated galls to obtain a black hair dye. Apart from tanning the galls are also used by the colouring industry, as well as for making ink.

Medicinally, the unperforated gall is generally used to make a tincture or ointment. Herbalists have recommended these galls for treating cholera, diarrhoea and dysentery, and to ease piles, various skin disorders and stem bleeding. They have also long been used in Chinese medicine.