

*Tilia cordata*

[Synonyms : *Tilia europaea*, *Tilia intermedia*, *Tilia microphylla*, *Tilia parvifolia*, *Tilia silvestris*, *Tilia ulmifolia*, *Tilia vulgaris*]

**LIME (Linden)** is a deciduous tree (occasionally a shrub). Native to Europe it has small highly fragrant, yellowish-white flowers with many stamens.

It is also known as Common lime, European lime tree, European linden, *Lind* (Swedish), *Linde* (German), Linden, Linden flowers, Linden tree, Linn flowers, *Lípa malolistá* (Czech), *Lípa srdčitá* (Czech), Little-leaf lime, Little-leaf linden, *Metsälehmus* (Finnish), *Pisgwydden Deilen Fach* (Welsh), *Skogslind* (Swedish), Small-leaved European lime, Small-leaved lime, Small-leaved linden, *Tiglio* (Italian), *Tilia* (Spanish), *Tilleul* (French), and *Winterlinde* (German); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of conjugal love, gentleness, hospitality, modesty, pliancy, and sweetness.

In Spring a burrowing insect causes the tree to drip sticky secretions.

Warning – old, slightly fermented flowers or leaves can cause mild intoxication and hallucinations – and should not be used in preparations. The blossom can cause allergies in some sensitive skins.

*Cordata* is derived from Greek *cordi-* (heart) component meaning ‘heart-shaped’ with reference to the leaves.

The name ‘linden’ comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *lind* meaning a ‘shield’ which was made out of the easily worked lime wood. Some say the Latin word *lentus* (flexible) is a description of the lime’s pliable fibrous inner bark. (The inner bark has been used for centuries to bind vines and other creeping plants in order to support them without damage.)

For the ancient Greeks and the Romans the lime was associated with the legend of Baucis and Philemon, a homely, elderly couple who gave generous hospitality to two strangers who had been rejected by their wealthier neighbours. The strangers proved to be Zeus and Hermes in disguise and they punished the disagreeable locality by flooding it to cover the homes of all but their hosts. The elderly couple’s home became a beautiful temple beside this new lake and they held priestly office there to the end of their lives (they had been granted their wish for simultaneous death to avoid parting from each other) and at their death they were transformed side-by-side, Baucis into a linden tree (conjugal love) and Philemon into an oak, *Quercus* (hospitality).

On the other hand the Indo-Germanic nations revered the tree as sacred. It was also symbolic and closely associated in Germany with the fate of both individuals and groups. There a linden tree was often planted at the birth of a family heir and its growth was supposed to parallel that of the child – an analogy that was also applied to whole families. This was taken sufficiently seriously that in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century it was rumoured that distinct stems on a linden (three of them, each one representing a separate family) had perished as the last member of the relevant family died leaving no heirs. One of these families was said to be that of Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778) the renowned Swedish naturalist, who established the modern systems of botanical and zoological classification. The main square in most German towns has its official linden tree and this too can sometimes be watched as an indicator of the town’s fate.

In Germanic mythology when Siegfried was immersed in the magical river by his mother to make him invulnerable, it was a linden leaf that clung to his back. The area covered by the leaf remained unprotected and proved eventually to be his downfall.

Not only is the tree planted in towns and around houses in Europe as a whole both for its beauty and the shade it provides but the white wood (which is easy to work and the lightest of European native trees) is also used for carving. Grinling Gibbons (1648-1720) an English sculptor and woodcarver who was actually born in Rotterdam in the Netherlands and practised his art in many of the historic buildings in England, favoured the lime for its ability to accept sharpness of detail. He used it when carving flowers and figures, examples of which can be seen at Windsor Castle, Chatsworth and St. Paul's Cathedral. The wood has also been used to make furniture, cutlery, musical instruments and packing cases. It yields a charcoal that has not only been sought after by artists but has also been made into gunpowder and still is.

In the past the inner bark fibre was used in Sweden to make fishing nets. It was made into baskets too and, because of its suppleness, appreciated by rope-makers .

Today the flowers are an ingredient used by the cosmetics industry.

The famous English playwright, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) mentions the lime tree (using the old name 'line') two or three times in *The Tempest* including in Ariel's direction to the Nymphs when he enters carrying 'glistening apparel'

Come, hang them on this line.

The tree is also celebrated by another English poet, Robert Nichols (1893-1944) who served in the First World War, in his poem entitled *The Sprig of Lime*

..... Her trembling hand  
Closed his loose fingers on the awkward stem,  
Covered above with gentle heart-shaped leaves  
And under dangling, pale as honey-wax,  
Square clusters of sweet-scented starry flowers. ....

Apart from the flower language symbolism identified in English-speaking countries, in Germany particularly the whole tree is recognized as a symbol of justice.

Linden (or lime tree) tea is a popular tonic tea in some European countries, particularly France where it is called *tilleule*. This is made from the flowers. The lime is used in folk medicine and in eastern Europe it is used in the treatment of high blood pressure. In the past herbalists have recommended an infusion of the freshly dried flowers for treating indigestion, vomiting and hysteria. Today lime can be used as a remedy for headaches, catarrh, indigestion and nervous disorders.

It is the birthday flower for 7<sup>th</sup> February.