

Commiphora (*Commiphora wildii*)

Description and Distribution

There are over 200 species of *Commiphora* worldwide, occurring in Africa, Arabia, the Indian Ocean islands and India. Many *Commiphora* species exude an aromatic resin that has a pleasant smell.(1) The Arabic *C. myrrah* produces a resin which is used medicinally and as incense, while *C. gileadensis*, occurring in Arabia and north-east Africa, produces a “Balm of Gilead”.(1) Namibia has a large number of *Commiphora* species and is considered the centre of diversity.

Many *Commiphora* species exude a resin that has a pleasant smell.(1) The *Commiphora wildii*, a small tree is near endemic in Namibia, extending from the southern parts of Angola to just south of the Ugab River, along the western parts of the Kunene Region. The trees grow on rocky slopes of hills and mountains. (2) The stem has a peeling bark and large stalk-less leaves that are glossy green.(1)

Harvesting and Processing

An essential oil is produced from the resin of *C. wildii*. The resin naturally exudes from the tree and hardens on the stem. It can be harvested during the dry summer months. Once the rainy season starts the resin production stops. The resin is harvested by picking it up from the ground or off the bark of the tree. This is usually done with a stone or piece of bark to avoid harming the tree. The harvesting process is non-destructive. The resin is then taken to be distilled to produce the concentrated essential oil known as Namibian Myrrh. (2)



Uses and Properties

Due to the high concentration of the essential oil only little needs to be used in products. The oil is found as a flavour additive in many everyday products such as toothpaste, soap, perfume and lip balms to name a few. *Commiphora wildii* resin was originally used by the Himba as a perfume.(2) The essential oil has a smooth, fresh and slightly spicy aroma, which is rich in anti-oxidants and claimed to make it a great anti-inflammatory product. The essential oil has anti-oxidant, anti-bacterial and anti-fungal activities, and soothing, moisturising and aroma-therapeutic properties. (3)

The Namibian Myrrh is found in products for athlete’s foot, weeping eczema, bedsores, acne and boils. It is present in mouthwashes and can be applied to gums and teeth. (4)



References

1. <http://pza.sanbi.org/commiphora>
2. The Commercialisation of Indigenous Natural Plant Products in Namibia- book
3. <http://www.mbiri-skincare.com/product/namibian-myrrh-essential-oil/>
4. <http://www.stillpure.co.za/namibian-myrrh.html>
5. <http://www.mbiri-skincare.com/product/namibian-myrrh-essential-oil/>