

Fact Sheet: COMMIPHORA

Commiphora wildii

Common Names

Otjiherero: Omumbiri
German: Eichenblattbalsam

Introduction



Commiphora wildii is a deciduous shrub-like tree 1-2,5 m tall growing mostly over rocks. The trunk branches just above ground level into relatively thick stems. The bark is grey-brown, shiny, smooth and occasionally peeling in papery strips. The young branchlets are very short and stout with leaves pinnately lobed like oak leaves. Flowers are unisexual and fruit are red ovoid to subglobose (Curtis & Mannheimer, 2005).



Status Namibia: protected, near endemic

Distribution

(Curtis & Mannheimer, 2005)

In Namibia mainly on the edge of the Namib Desert, it is found from the northern border of Kaokoland to Uis in the south.



Traditional knowledge

The amber-coloured resin collected from *C. wildii* is the most important plant product used by Himba women in their traditional perfume (Curtis & Nott, 2006). The essential oil distilled from the resin is rich in anti-oxidants and is used as anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory agent. The smooth fresh and slightly spicy aroma is used to fragrance various cosmetic products (Nott, 2014).

Harvesting and sustainable use of resource

In the hot, dry season when temperatures start rising, the *C. wildii* trees produce their resin. The Himba women harvest their Omumbiri resin by picking it up from the ground below the plant or by picking it off the branches. Only naturally exuded resin is collected and non-destructive methods of harvesting are used. The resource is available in far greater quantities than is needed traditionally which enabled commercialisation of resin and its essential oil called Namibian Myrrh. The plant sub-committees in the five established Kunene conservancies provide a mechanism for the sustainable utilisation and management of this resource (Curtis & Nott, 2006). With the support of Namibian Government and several development grants a viable and community based supply chain has been developed since 2006 (Nott, 2014).



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Processing

The resin is distilled into an essential oil known as Namibian Myrrh. The Opuwo Processing Facility is owned by the Kunene Conservancies Indigenous Natural Products Trust, which is made up of representatives of the conservancies where the resin is harvested.



Composition and use

The essential oil from the *C. wildii* resin is a complex mixture of compounds, consisting mostly of monoterpenes, oxygenated monoterpenes, sesquiterpenes, oxygenated sesquiterpenes and diterpenes. The oil produced from fresh resin is qualitatively different from the oil produced from the mature resin (Sheehama, 2017).

MSDS available from KCINPT

CAS: 1082996-27-7

INCI: COMMIPHORA MYRRHA OIL

Potential for further development

Namibian Myrrh has a highly distinct cultural use background and is a unique true myrrh. In addition to the current use of this ingredient both regionally and internationally, further expansion into the international cosmetic market is envisaged (Scents of Namibia, 2018).

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