



Sublime sandalwood

.....
Sandalwood was an elusive luxury until Australia grew an abundant alternative to endangered Indian sandalwood, writes naturopath Caroline Robertson.

I FIRST fell in love with sandalwood on a scorching Calcutta day, when a Hindu priest sponged it on my sweaty forehead with a marigold flower. It felt amazing, like a Himalayan breeze air-conditioning my brain. Since then, sandalwood incense, oil and powder have been indispensable items in my regular routine. The precious sandalwood plant has pervaded sacred ceremonies, medicine, and beauty therapies for 5,000 years. Its fragrance lingers for decades due to its deep fixative nature: every Eastern temple is infused with the alluring aroma of sandalwood.

Held in supreme esteem in India, Egypt, Greece and Rome, sandalwood was used externally and internally. It was applied to skin conditions and to sanctify deities, babies, brides, and corpses. Sandalwood is the signature scent of South India, with sandalwood incense and paste essential to Hindu rituals. Sandalwood brings luck, as the goddess Lakshmi resides in its tan trunk. Ayurvedic aromatherapy values sandalwood oil to calm, cool and stabilise, and it is integral to popular perfumes including “Obsession” by Calvin Klein and “Opium” by

Yves St Laurent. Sandalwood’s fragrance and fixative properties also make it an ideal ingredient for personal care products.

Sandalwood’s story

Sturdy sandalwood trees can grow up to 33 feet, survive 100 years, and have 29 species. The Indian sandalwood species *Santalum album* has been extensively researched for its medicinal properties. Hawaii’s *Santalum ellipticum* and Vanuatu’s *Santalum austrocaledonicum* are popular South Pacific medicines. Sandalwood is depleted and so it is on the threatened species list in India, which restricts its harvesting and export. Considering the trees are best harvested after 30 years old and the whole tree is used, the high demand exceeds supply, leading to exorbitant prices and poaching.

Since sandalwood is almost extinct, Australian sandalwood is a sustainable option. Though drier and less fragrant than the Indian variety, it shares the same antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, anti-itch and anti-fever properties. Australia supplies 60% of the world’s sandalwood trade and has six species of sandalwood; however, only *Santalum spicatum* and *lanceolatum* are commercial. The



Studies have shown that, even without smelling it, applying sandalwood oil creates calm and clarity, enhancing meditation practice, memory, and serenity.

therapeutic α -santalol and 20-25% the fragrant β -santalol. These active alcohols have many applications in the pharmaceutical and perfumery world. There are also several synthetic odorants, including sandalore and brahmanol, which share sandalwood's potential wound-healing properties.

Soothing sandalwood

Sandalwood is a good friend if you've got pimples, pains, bites, burning, wrinkles, or worries. Sandalwood soothes inflammation and infections, like ice on a burn. Ayurveda salutes sandalwood as the cooling Queen. Ayurvedic doctors turn to sandalwood or 'chandana' for heat-related conditions of the blood, liver, urinary tract, digestive system, eyes, and skin. Its actions include anti-inflammatory, anti-itch, antiseptic, antispasmodic, aphrodisiac, astringent, antipyretic, brain tonic, carminative, disinfectant, diuretic, emollient, expectorant, hypotensive, sedative, and skin tonic. It can be used for arthritic pain, cystitis, fevers, heat stroke, high blood pressure, menstrual pain, and respiratory tract infections. However sandalwood really excels with skin problems. For a smooth, soft, clear complexion, sandalwood is your skin saver. It can help acne, eczema, herpes, pigmentation, psoriasis, sunburn, tinea, wrinkles, and even golden staph. Four studies have also shown that alpha-santalol is effective against skin cancer. For acne, try a mask of 1 part sandalwood powder, 1 part turmeric and 12 parts besan flour. Mix 1 tablespoon with rosewater, apply and wash off after 10 minutes. Alternatively mix 5 drops sandalwood oil with 50ml jojoba oil or water and apply to areas of concern twice daily. Steaming or spritzing the face with diluted sandalwood is a wonderful way to stay cool and moisturised. Chandanadi oil and Chandanadi Vati are Ayurvedic preparations starring sandalwood. With its woody, sweet notes, sandalwood oil blends well with bergamot, clove, cypress, frankincense, geranium, jasmine, lavender, lemon, patchouli, rose, tuberose, vetivert and ylang ylang essential oils. Though sandalwood is safe, it's best to use dilute and do a skin patch test. ✨

first Australian sandalwood tree was harvested and exported to China in 1844 and the oil was first produced in Australia around the 1870s. It's mainly cultivated in Western Australia with around 161 million hectares of sandalwood, of which around 49% is protected by the Forest Products Commission of Western Australia (FPC) to ensure longevity. Mount Romance in Western Australia is a large sandalwood supplier with an organic, sustainable, high quality and Fair Trade supply. Australian sandalwood is a small shrub of 3-12 metres and is a parasitic plant that needs to be planted with a native for nutrition.

Sandalwood science

The process of extracting sandalwood oil can take a week. Indian sandalwood's most opulent oil is obtained from the heartwood of trees 80 years or older. The whole plant is transformed to liquid gold through five steps: wood chipping, boiling, steaming, condensation, and separation. The ingredients in sandalwood vary, according to the age of the plant and extraction process. Generally sandalwood contains 90% sesquiterpenic alcohols of which 50-60% is the

✨ The peace plant

If you want to be calm and cool-headed, sandalwood is like Valium vapour. All smells shift our state by speaking directly to the brain and sandalwood whispers, "chillax ...". If you're feeling afraid, anxious or angry, dabbing a dot of sandalwood oil on your forehead can calm you like a loving hug. Sandalwood's sesquiterpenes pass through the brain-blood barrier, boosting oxygen to the cranium while balancing the pineal and pituitary glands. Sandalwood sedates without inducing sleep, with research showing that sandalwood calms without the drowsiness lavender can cause. It was proven to enhance alertness in a study where researchers found it increased pulse rate and improved skin conductance of electricity. Though sandalwood doesn't directly send you to sleep, it increases the duration of deep non-REM sleep, according to a 2007 study. Sandalwood could be called 'the enlightenment essence', as it grounds the base chakra, opens the ajna third eye chakra and enhances serenity similar to samadhi. No surprise then that sandalwood is the premier essence in religious rituals and yoga centres. Therapeutically sandalwood is useful for ADD, addictions, anxiety, anger, autism, dementia, depression, grief, insomnia, irritability, low libido, memory loss, PMT, and schizophrenia. It can be added to body products such as hair oil, diluted in a blissful bath, spritzed on pillows, applied as perfume, or burnt as incense.

Caroline Robertson is a naturopath and Ayurvedic practitioner who can be found by following the sandalwood smoke from her Sydney centre. www.carolinerobertson.com.au, 0430 092 601