

Benzoin Essential Oil Health and Beauty Benefits

The benzoin tree is a deciduous shrub-like tropical tree that is native to Asia and can grow up to 28 feet (nine meters) in height. It has pale green, ovate and pointed leaves that are almost white underneath. It produces white clusters of silky, bell-shaped flowers during the spring, as well as fruit which is hard-shelled, flat in shape, and about the size of a nutmeg.

Benzoin resin comes from the bark of several species of trees in the genus *Styrax*. The resin can be harvested when the trees are seven years of age or older. The resin is harvested as a gum from the tree by making a small cut to the bark. The trunk "bleeds" a balsamic sap (gum resin). This resin hardens upon being exposed to light and air, and is then collected. The taste of the resin, is very bitter. Still, it is often used as a flavoring in some food products.

TWO DIFFERENT BENZOINS

While mostly native to warm temperate to tropical regions of the Northern Hemisphere, with the majority in eastern and southeastern Asia, it has also spread across the equator into South America. *Styrax tonkinensis*, also called *benzoin Siam*, comes from trees found natively growing in places such as Cambodia, China, Laos, Thailand, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Benzoin Siam (*S. tonkinensis*) is not used medicinally but is more customarily used in manufacturing in the flavor and fragrance industries and can be found in commercially available products.

Styrax benzoin grows in the Sumatra and Malaysian regions; hence, it's called *Sumatra benzoin*. Sumatran benzoin contains *cinnamic acid* in addition to *benzoic acid*. In the U.S., Sumatra benzoin (*Styrax benzoin* and *Styrax paralleloneurus*) is more customarily used in traditional medicine, for incense and perfumes, and for pharmaceutical preparations. Benzoin is available to buy as chunks of resin, as an oil, or in preparations such as skin-soothing creams. You might find the oil listed as "onycha" essential oil.

You may hear it called *Baume benjoin*, *Benjamin tree*, *benjoin de Sumatra*, *benjoin*, *benjuí*, *benzoe*, *Benzoin tree*, *benzoine*, *gum Benjamin*, *barley gum*, *gum Benzoin*, *Haminjon toba*, *loban*, *lohban*, *Palembang benzoin*, *Siam benzoin*, *Styrax benzoin*, *Styrax paralleloneurum*, *Styrax tonkinensis*, *Sumatra benzoin*. In India it is called *Sambrani* or *loban*, though *loban* is, via Arabic *lubān*, a generic term for frankincense-type incense, e.g., fragrant tree resin.

Benzoin is also called *storax*, not to be confused with *storax balsam*, which is obtained from the *Hamamelidaceae* family. *Hamamelidaceae*, commonly referred to as the witch-hazel family, is a family of flowering plants in the order *Saxifragales*.

Tincture of benzoin (*Friar's Balsam*) is used in medicine. It is distinct from the chemical compound benzoin, which is ultimately derived chemically from benzoin resin; the resin, however, does not contain this compound. Tincture of benzoin is a pungent solution of benzoin resin in ethanol, a preparation that additionally contains *Cape aloes* or *Barbados aloes* and *storax* resin, it was originally invented by Joshua Ward around 1760.

The chemical compound benzoin is used in organic syntheses. It appears as off-white crystals, with an odor of camphor and a slightly acrid taste. When broken the fresh surfaces have a milky-white color. Chemical compound benzoin is an FDA-approved color additive used for marking fruits and vegetables.

THE HISTORY OF BENZOIN RESIN

Benzoin is a common ingredient in incense-making and perfumery because of its sweet vanilla-like aroma. In perfumery, benzoin is used as a fixative, slowing the dispersion of essential oils and other

fragrance materials into the air, and to extend their shelf life. Benzoin resin is a major component of the type of church incense used in Russia and some other Orthodox Christian societies, as well as Western Catholic Churches. Most benzoin is used in Arabian and Hindu temples of India, where it is burned on charcoal as an incense. It is also used in the production of *Bakhoo* (Arabic روكب, scented wood chips) as well as various mixed resin incense in the Arab countries and the Horn of Africa (HoA).

The Horn of Africa is also known as the Somali Peninsula, a large peninsula in East Africa located on the easternmost part of the African mainland, it is the fourth largest peninsula in the world. It is composed of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, and Djibouti. Benzoin is also used in blended types of Japanese incense, Indian incense (*Agarbatti*), Chinese incense (known as *Anxi xiang*; 安息香), and Papier d'Arménie (a type of incense produced for centuries, made in France) as well as incense sticks.

THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF BENZOIN RESIN

Benzoin has been used in many ways in the past. In France, it was burned and inhaled in order to ease respiratory issues. In Southern Asia, it was used to heal circumcision wounds. It is used in small quantities as a flavoring in alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages, baked goods, chewing gum, frozen dairy, gelatins, puddings, and soft candy.

Prior to its use in the medical field, benzoin resin was often used in making aromatic products. Many skin care products featuring the resin continue to be available, including soaps, lotions, and creams. You can find it on the labels of many sunscreens, and some companies use it as a preservative in their cosmetic products as well.

ANTISEPTIC

The main modern use for benzoin resin is as an antiseptic. It is used to treat shingles and ringworm. Its antiseptic properties also make it a useful treatment for urinary tract infections (UTIs) and a mild form of gum disease (gingivitis).

WOUND HEALING

Benzoin resin is used on the skin for ulcers, cold sores (herpes labialis), canker sores and bed sores (pressure ulcers).

EXTREME SKIN CARE

It is also useful in treating chapped, cracked or blistered skin.

UPPER RESPIRATORY SYMPTOMS

Benzoin resin can be used as an inhalant to treat the swelling (inflammation) of the main airways in the lungs (bronchitis) and of the voice box (laryngitis). There is some evidence that benzoin may also help to break up chest congestion by thinning mucous and acting as an expectorant. Children with croup may be treated with a benzoin resin vapor in boiling water. The same can be used to ease symptoms of a common cold, cough and a sore throat.

IN AROMATHERAPY

Often mentioned in aromatherapy guides and popular in incense making, benzoin resin has an uplifting, warm scent that reminds many people of vanilla. Fans of this once considered sacred resin burn it to alleviate sadness and depression and to boost mood.

HOMEMADE PERFUMERY, SCENTED CANDLES AND INCENSE

Benzoin resin is most popularly used in incense. If you are making your own perfume or incense, you can use benzoin resin as a base—but use it sparingly, as it is very strong. Benzoin resin mixes well with floral

or spiced notes, including: black pepper (*Piper nigrum*), copaiba balsam (*Copaifera officinalis*), cedarwood, coriander, cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*), frankincense (**If you choose this one, only purchase from a responsible, sustainable source, as the trees have been over-harvested**), ginger, jasmine, juniper (*Juniperus communis*), lemon (*Citrus limon*, as well as other citrusy oils like orange, tangerine, and bergamot), may chang (*Litsea cubeba*), nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*), myrrh, patchouli (*Pogostemon cablin*), rose, sandalwood and vetiver.

HOW TO BURN BENZOIN RESIN

To burn a resin such as benzoin, you'll need a special resin incense burner (some will also require resin sand, which protects the dish). Next, light a charcoal disk tablet made especially for burning resins. Let it heat up a bit and place it onto the burner using charcoal tongs. *The charcoal is what provides the steady heat that will release scent from the resin.* Gently put a few small bits of resin onto the charcoal tablet once heated.

Note: Resins can be quite strong in scent and throw off smoke, so only burn resins in a well-ventilated space.

DOSAGE

The appropriate dose of benzoin resin depends on several factors such as the user's age, health, and several other conditions. At this time there is not enough scientific information to determine an appropriate range of doses for benzoin resin. Be sure to follow relevant directions on product labels and always consult your physician before using. If you have a current infection, consult your physician before using.

HEALTH BENEFITS OF COMPOUND BENZOIN TINCTURE

Compound benzoin tincture is used on minor skin sores and wounds to protect the area from irritation and infection. It is also used on canker sores in and around the mouth to protect them so they can heal. It is also used to help relieve and soothe minor irritation of the nose, throat, and airways (such as laryngitis, croup) when it is mixed with hot water and the steam is inhaled.

HOW TO USE COMPOUND BENZOIN TINCTURE

1. If using the over-the-counter product to self-treat, read and follow all directions on the product package before using. If prescribed by your doctor, use it as directed.
2. When used on the skin, clean and dry the affected area first. Then apply to skin as directed.
3. If using the spray form, shake container well before using.
4. If using the product for inhalation, mix it with hot water as directed and inhale the steam (vapor).
5. Do not use in large amounts, use more often, or use for a longer time than directed. The risk for side effects will be increased.
6. Avoid use in children younger than 6 months.
7. For topical use only, do not drink or swallow. Avoid contact in or around the eyes.
8. If condition does not improve in a few days or if it worsens, contact your physician right away.

PRECAUTIONS

A physician should be consulted prior to taking any herbal remedy. Some herbal remedies may interact with other prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications, causing undesirable side effects.

Benzoin resin is likely safe when used in amounts found in foods. It is possibly unsafe when used in medicinal amounts. Taking compound benzoin tincture accidentally by mouth has caused stomach bleeding. Benzoin resin is possibly safe when inhaled with the steam from hot water.

Compound benzoin tincture usually contains a large amount of alcohol. Keep out of the reach of children and carefully monitor children while they are using.

There isn't enough reliable information to know if benzoin resin is safe to use when pregnant or breast-feeding. Stay on the safe side and avoid use. During pregnancy, compound benzoin tincture should be used **only when clearly indicated**. It is not known whether compound benzoin tincture passes into breast milk. Consult your physician before breast-feeding.

Benzoin resin is possibly safe when applied to the skin in appropriate amounts. It can cause skin rashes in people with sensitive skin. Mild irritation, burning, or redness of the skin may occur as your body adjusts to compound benzoin tincture. If any of these symptoms persist or worsen, stop use and tell your physician promptly. Most people using compound benzoin tincture do not have serious side effects.

Serious allergic reactions to compound benzoin tincture are rare. However, seek immediate medical attention if you notice any of the following symptoms: rash, itching or swelling (especially of the face, tongue, and throat), severe dizziness, or trouble breathing.

Do not start, stop, or change the dosage of any medicine before first checking with your physician. It may be harmful if swallowed. Always perform a skin patch test prior to using. Benzoin essential oil should not be used in ultrasonic diffusers or any that clog easily. It is very viscous and is best suited to being mixed with other oils in candle warmer type diffusers.

STORAGE

Compound benzoin tincture is flammable. Store it at room temperature away from heat, flame, and direct sunlight. Refer to storage information printed on the package. Keep away from children and pets.

Never flush medications down the toilet or pour them into a drain unless instructed to do so. Properly discard when it has expired or no longer needed. Always consult your pharmacist or local waste disposal service for more details about how to safely discard your medications.

HEALTH BENEFITS OF BENZOIN ESSENTIAL OIL

Because benzoin essential oil has anesthetic, antibacterial, antidepressant and anti-inflammatory properties, it is used in traditional medicines to treat arthritis, bronchitis, coughing, laryngitis, and stress. It is used topically, not internally.

Benzoin essential oil smells like warm, creamy vanilla with balsamic undertones and a touch of cinnamon. This pleasant scent lends it well as a fragrance in perfumery, toiletries, cosmetics, scented candles and incense making.

It was first described in the 14th Century; the Arabs called benzoin essential oil "frankincense of Java", and it's had a long tradition of use in pomanders, potpourri, incense and soaps. In perfumery, it is especially widely used in *ambrées*. It used for both feminine and masculine fragrances. You may be surprised to find benzoin as an ingredient in Chanel *Coromandel*, Givenchy *Pi*, Hermes *Terre d'Hermes*, Prada *No9 Benjoin* and Yves Saint Laurent *Opium*.

Here's a great video by Robert Pappas where he demonstrates the evaporation of diluted and undiluted essential oils.

<https://youtu.be/T3enekQT1I8>

HEALING OF CHAPPED SKIN

Benzoin essential oil is used as a skin protectant for chapped lips. This oil is ideal for itchy, red spots, as well as for deep healing of skin, such as on cracked heels. Benzoin essential oil combined with myrrh (*Commiphora myrrha*) and geranium (*Pelargonium graveolens*) essential oils in equal amounts added to a high quality Shea butter or coconut butter will work wonders. According to *The Encyclopedia of Essential Oils*, it should be diluted to avoid skin irritation, be sure to follow [the rules of dilution](#).

EASES UPPER RESPIRATORY CONDITIONS

When you think of essential oils to reach for in cases of respiratory conditions like bronchitis, tonsillitis, asthma and the like, you probably think of varieties of peppermints or eucalyptus. WebMD reports that benzoin essential oil can also be used via inhalation (such as with a diffuser) for treatment of chest congestion and that it may help work as an expectorant. Use two drops each of benzoin, hyssop (*H. officinalis* var. *decumbens*), and lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) essential oils in a bowl of steaming hot water. Breathe in the vapors with a towel over your head for five minutes.

FOOT ODOR

In a [2018 study of e-publication *Planta Medica*](#), researchers wanted to determine what essential oils would be best used to cover up embarrassing foot odor (bromodosis). This issue is often caused by the *Brevibacterium* species of bacteria. Out of 118 combinations of essential oils, they found that *S. benzoin* combined with *Juniperus communis* (juniper) had a synergy against all three versions of the bacteria tested. And topical use of a tincture of benzoin was effective in treating infections from bacteria and fungi such as *Candida albicans* (yeast infections) and *Mycobacterium fortuitum* (toe nail fungus).

SKIN PROTECTION

Benzoin essential oil, in conjunction with the herbs aloe, tolu balsam, and storax, works well as a skin protector. Together, they are called "[compound benzoin tincture](#)." People also use benzoin to treat bed sores, small cuts and wounds, skin ulcers, and to reduce inflammation from injuries. Benzoin essential oil acts as a *styptic*, it actually stops minor wounds from bleeding. Medical-grade preparations of tincture of benzoin are used to increase the stickiness of adhesive bandages for wound care.

THERAPEUTIC USES OF BENZOIN ESSENTIAL OIL

In the winter, there is nothing like a hot bath with some essential oils to ease stress and anxiety, and provide a whole body therapeutic warmth. Try the following recipes the next time you're looking for a little self-care.

WARMING BATH 1

INGREDIENTS

- 3 drops sweet marjoram (*Origanum majoranum*)
- 2 drops benzoin (*Styrax benzoin*)
- 1 drop clary sage (*Salvia sclarea*)
- 1 drop sweet orange (*Citrus sinensis*)

DIRECTIONS

1. Add the oils to a cup of Epsom salts or a teaspoon of aloe vera.
2. Then swirl into your bath water.

WARMING BATH 2

INGREDIENTS

- 4 drops lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)
- 2 drops ginger (*Syzygium aromaticum*)
- 2 drops frankincense (*Boswellia carterii*)
- 1 drop benzoin (*S. benzoin*)

DIRECTIONS

1. Add the oils to a cup of Epsom salts or a teaspoon of aloe vera.
2. Then swirl into your bath water.

BUYING & STORING

While it is not technically an essential oil, when purchasing, find a supplier you can trust. Make sure the product you purchase has the name, botanical name, and country of origin. There should be no other ingredients listed, and it should be supplied in a dark glass bottle. Use it sparingly and be sure only to use it in diffusers that won't get clogged, like the candle-warming types.

Tags: holistic health, stress relief, skin care