

Styrax officinalis

Styrax officinalis is a species of plants belonging to the family Styracaceae.

1 Varieties

Several botanical varieties exist:

- *Styrax officinalis* var. *californicus* (Torr.) Rehder (1915) (synonym : *Styrax californicus* Torr.)
- *Styrax officinalis* var. *fulvescens* (Eastw.) Munz & I.M. Johnst. (1924) (synonym : *Styrax californicus* var. *fulvescens* Eastw.)
- *Styrax officinalis* var. *jaliscanus* (S. Watson) Perkins (1907) (synonym : *Styrax jaliscana* S.Watson)
- *Styrax officinalis* subsp. *redivivus* (Torr.) Thorne (1978) (synonym : *Darlingtonia rediviva* Torr., *Styrax officinalis* var. *redivivus* (Torr.) R.A. Howard)

The California varieties *Styrax officinalis* subsp. *redivivus* (Torrey) H. Howard and *Styrax officinalis* subsp. *fulvescens* (Styracaceae) have generally been regarded as the same species, but recent molecular analysis has suggested that they may be diverged to the point of being separate species.^[2]

2 Description

Styrax officinalis is a deciduous shrub reaching a height of 2–5 metres (6 ft 7 in–16 ft 5 in).^[3] It has a simple, relaxed form, with very thin elliptical leaves 5–10 cm (2–4 in) long and 3.5–5.5 cm (1 ½–2 in) wide, alternate and widely spaced on thin, reddish stems, with a tight, dark bark on basal stems. A small very light green, stalked axillary bud is associated with each leaf.

The inflorescence is short and few-flowered. The flowers are axillary, bell-shaped, white and fragrant, about 2 cm (1 in) long. The corolla has 5–7 petals and many yellow anthers, the calyx is 5-lobed. Flowering period extends from spring to summer (May-June).^[4]

This plant is the “official” source of styrax, an herbal medicine known from ancient times. Some believe it to have been the stacte used together with frankincense, galbanum, and onycha to make Ketoret, the Tabernacle incense of the Old Testament.^[5]



Close-up on a flower of *Styrax officinalis*



Fruits

3 Distribution

This species is native to southern Europe and the Middle East. The species has been considered to include *S. redivivus*, native to California.^[2] It prefers dry rocky slopes, woods and thickets at an elevation up to 1,500 metres (4,900 ft) above sea level.^[3]

4 References

- [1] “The Plant List: A Working List of All Plant Species”. Retrieved 27 September 2014.
- [2] Peter Frisch (March 1996). “Isozyme Analysis of Intercontinental Disjuncts within *Styrax* (Styracaceae): Implications for the Madrean-Tethyan Hypothe-

sis". *American Journal of Botany* **83** (3): 342–355.
doi:10.2307/2446169. JSTOR 2446169.

[3] Plants for a Future

[4] “Mildred E. Mathias Botanical Garden Newsletter” **5** (2).
1999. (includes helpful photos of the features described)

[5] James A. Duke (2007). *Duke's Handbook of Medicinal
Plants of the Bible*. p. 447. ISBN 978-0-8493-8202-4.

5 External links

- Jepson Manual Treatment: *Styrax redivivus*
- Calflora: *Styrax redivivus*
- Tropicos

6 Text and image sources, contributors, and licenses

6.1 Text

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