

Benzoin resin

Not to be confused with benzoin.

Benzoin resin is a balsamic resin obtained from the



Kemenyan, benzoin resin as sold in Gombong, Central Java

bark of several species of trees in the genus *Styrax*. It is used in perfumes, some kinds of incense, as a flavoring, and medicine (see tincture of benzoin). Commonly called “benzoin”, it is called “benzoin resin” here to distinguish it from the chemical compound benzoin. Benzoin resin does *not* contain this crystalline compound.

Benzoin is also called **gum benzoin** or **gum benjamin**, but “gum” is incorrect as benzoin is not a polysaccharide. Its name came via the Italian from the Arabic *lubān jāwī* (لبان جاوي, “frankincense from Java”).^[1]

Benzoin resin is also called **styrax balsam** or **styrax resin**, but wrongly, since those resins are obtained from a different plant family, *Hamamelidaceae*.

Benzoin resin is a common ingredient in incense-making and perfumery because of its sweet vanilla-like aroma and fixative properties. Gum benzoin 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.^[2] Most benzoin is used in Arab States of the Persian Gulf and India, where it is burned on charcoal as an incense. It is also used in the production of Bakhoor (Arabic بخور - scented wood chips) as well as various mixed resin incense in the Arab countries and the Horn of Africa. Benzoin resin is also used in blended types of Japanese incense, Indian incense, Chinese incense (known as Anxi xiang; 安息香), and Papier d'Arménie as well as incense sticks.

There are two common kinds of benzoin resin, benzoin Siam and benzoin Sumatra. Benzoin Siam is obtained from *Styrax tonkinensis*, found across Thailand, Laos,

Cambodia, and Vietnam. Benzoin Sumatra is obtained from *Styrax benzoin*, which grows predominantly on the island of Sumatra.^[3] Unlike Siamese benzoin, Sumatran benzoin contains cinnamic acid in addition to benzoic acid.^[4] In the United States, Sumatra benzoin (*Styrax benzoin* and *Styrax paralleoneurus*) is more customarily used in pharmaceutical preparations, Siam benzoin (*Styrax tonkinensis* et al.) in the flavor and fragrance industries.^[5]

In perfumery, benzoin is used as a fixative, slowing the dispersion of essential oils and other fragrance materials into the air.^[3] Benzoin resin is used in cosmetics, veterinary medicine, and scented candles.^[4] It is used as a flavoring in alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages, baked goods, chewing gum, frozen dairy, gelatins, puddings, and soft candy.^[6]

1 References

- [1] A. Dietrich (1986), “LUBĀN”, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* 5 (2nd ed.), Brill, p. 786a
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- [3] Karl-Georg Fahlbusch; et al. (2007), “Flavors and Fragrances”, *Ullmann's Encyclopedia of Industrial Chemistry* (7th ed.), Wiley, p. 87
- [4] Klemens Fielbach; Dieter Grimm (2007), “Resins, Natural”, *Ullmann's Encyclopedia of Industrial Chemistry* (7th ed.), Wiley, p. 4
- [5] James A. Duke (2008), “Benzoin (Styrax benzoin Dryander.)”, *Duke's Handbook of Medicinal Plants of the Bible*, Taylor & Francis, p. 446
- [6] George A. Burdock (2010), “Benzoin Resin”, *Fenaroli's Handbook of Flavor Ingredients* (6th ed.), Taylor & Francis, pp. 139–140

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