

**Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:****Storax: *Styrax officinalis* – Quinces leaf storax
Storax resin: Perfumes of the Greek-orthodox church**

The Storax (*Styrax*) is a plant species, which consists of approximately 120 to 150 kinds of wood. Thus they are the largest genus of the family of the Storax plants (*Styracaceae*). It contains both summer-green and evergreen small trees, sometimes also bushes, which reach growth heights between 2 and 5 m. The summer-green kinds have often large sheets, with some kinds up to 20cm long. The simple, usually alternate leaves are pilose or rarely also smooth. Stipules are not present. The inflorescences can be bald or paniculate, the blooms rarely stand in fascicle or individually; they have yellowish anther. Their petals bend something together, so that the white blooms are easily bell-shaped (see fig.; taken on the 28th of April 2007 by R. Schwab, between Gories and Krasi, prefecture Iraklion). The fruits are drupes (see fig. continuation page) and contain usually only one seed. There are kinds with winged seeds; however most kinds have ribbed seeds, only some kinds have smooth seeds. The genuine Storax (*Styrax officinalis*) occurs also in the eastern Mediterranean area, so also on Crete.





Storax possesses aromatic-smelling resins, whose resin is then called also Styrax or Storax resin (see fig.). This has particularly been used as for religious ceremonies, in addition as cure and as a component of perfumes.

Until the 18th Century it exclusively originated from Asia Minor and from the eastern Mediterranean area coming Storax (*Styrax officinalis*). Afterwards the majority of the Storax resin comes from different kinds of the redgum (*Liquidambar orientalis*, *Liquidambar styraciflua*), which are therefore sometimes falsely called Storax. Accordingly the perfumes are called, depending upon origin genuine, Styrax (resin of *Styrax officinalis*) and wrong Styrax (resin of *Liquidambar* kinds).

It is won similarly as incense: The stem is cut, and the outgoing resinous mixture is collected. Since this raw material has a high liquid portion, it must be cultivated afterwards. This is done either with air-drying or via distillation. In former times only the steam distillation was used, which also results in the best quality. Nowadays often, partly only as intermediate stage, an alcohol is used, since this increases the yield.

The Styrax smoke smells rich sweetly and has a relaxing and reassuring effect. The balsam is already used since the antique to fumigate and is today, beside the incense, the most important perfumes of the Greek-orthodox church. Charcoal is mostly soaked with Styrax balsam, and then burned on coal or charcoal.



In the pharmacist encyclopedia *Styrax officinalis* is listed as Quinces leaf storax. The folk medicine uses the Styrax in case of bronchitis, heart illnesses, leprosy, apoplexy and constipation. It is used superficial for scab and as sore cure. Beside many other contents Styrax consists mainly of Cinnamic acid, Styracin, Vanillin, Cinnamein, Storesinol and a small quantity styrene.

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NR: **Botanical**; impr. eik.amp 08/2012

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