

# WOOD OF GODS AGARWOOD

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## INTRODUCTION

Agarwood is a valuable non-timber forest product, also known as eaglewood or gaharu, botanical name *Aquilaria malaccensis*. The species of the genus occur predominantly in South and Southeast Asia. *Aquilaria* species grow agarwood as a part of a defensive mechanism to fight off pathogens, which can be used for incense, perfume, and traditional medicines. In South and East Asia and the Middle East, the main markets for these goods are. The high agarwood prices have resulted in the rapid decline of *Aquilaria* trees in natural forests. From one country to another the search for agarwood has spread. Indonesia and Papua New Guinea are the primary supplies at present. The species was placed on CITES Appendix II as endangered due to the rapid decline of agarwood in the wild.

Efforts have been made to increase the yield of the infected wood by wounding the trees purposely. A number of methods are used for this purpose. Some techniques recently developed have proven to be the most effective. This led to the planting of *Aquilaria* trees by small holders and large plantations of industrial scale.



## HISTORY OF GAHARU

The most valuable and expensive timber currently in nature is Agarwood, Gaharu, Chen Xiang or Oudh. Because of the various uses and benefits each tree offers, it is also known as the natural treasure and the wood of God. The use of this treasured wood is dated as early as 600 AD and is also referred to as wood of aloe in the Bible. King Louis XIV of France had his shirts washed in rose water in which Aloeswood had been previously boiled.

The “Wood of the Gods” has at least a 3,000 year history in the Middle East, Japan and China. Only Kings and the very wealthy were able to benefit from its powers. There are references to agarwood in the literature of India. The Indian poet Kalidasa once wrote: “Beautiful ladies, preparing themselves for the feast of pleasures, cleanse themselves with the yellow powder of sandal, clear and pure, freshen their breast with pleasant aromas, and suspended their dark hair in the smoke of burning Aloeswood.”

## HEALTH BENEFITS

Traditionally, Gaharu tea has been known to provide its consumers with many beneficial properties. It also contains high levels of anti-carcinogen, anti-oxidant and anti-aging properties and is rich in essential nutrients such as calcium, zinc, iron, manganese and vitamins. It treats poor liver function and is a tonic that maintains, stabilises and reduces blood pressure for a healthy liver. Reducing insomnia (sleeping difficulty) is beneficial and provides a soothing effect, a stress-reliever. It preserves, stabilises and decreases the amount of diabetic blood sugar. It treats the lymphatic system (body defence system), improves constipation, stomach cramps, gassing, diarrhoea



and sensitive bowel (IBS). It cures uric acid (Gout). It relieves the respiratory system, chest pain, chronic cough, asthma, sinuses, and treats them.

## WOOD AND OIL OF THE GODS

Its weight in gold is well worth the Agarwood. Interestingly, it is the result of a genetic mutation of the *aquilaria* tree by naturally occurring bacteria in the wilderness. Agarwood is basically resinous heartwood, which slowly releases an exotic and heady fragrance, also known as ‘wood of God’. For the development of incense, religious products, soaps, fragrances, food aromas and even aphrodisiacs, it remains the main ingredient.

It is true that Agarwood/Aloeswood/Oudh Oil, today prized over pure gold, is the most valuable and costly oil commodity on Earth. 2012 retail prices around the world have risen dramatically due to over-harvesting of whole forests as well as the highly labor-intensive method of artisan distillation, and are typically US\$ 8,000-US\$ 32,000 and up for a kilogramme of Aloeswood chips and anywhere from US\$ 8,000-US\$ 61,000 for a single litre of pure Aloeswood Oil. It’s difficult to believe, but it happens on global markets every day.

Only in the South East Asia region can this precious wood be found, and each region produces different species of wood, all of which are highly sought after in the Middle East, China, Taiwan and Japan. Currently, Gaharu’s annual exports from Malaysia are RM 72 million per year. There have been several recorded cases of robbery and theft in the wild as a result of the high value and demand for Agarwood.