

Camphor-tree

Cinnamomum camphora (L.) J. S. Presl

Laurel family (Lauraceae)

Post-Cook introduction

Medium-sized to large introduced ornamental evergreen tree with dense rounded crown of three-veined shiny dark green leaves and distinctive odor of camphor in crushed foliage. To 80 ft (24 m) high and 3 ft (0.9 m) in trunk diameter. Bark gray, smoothish, becoming thick, rough, and furrowed. Inner bark pinkish, spicy bitter. Twigs slender, greenish, hairless. End buds enlarged, elliptical, pointed, ¼ inch (6 mm) long, brownish, composed of many rounded overlapping scales which form rings of scars on twigs upon shedding.

Leaves alternate or paired (opposite), hairless, with slender leafstalks ½–1¼ inches (1.3–3 cm) long. Blades elliptical, 2½–4 inches (6–10 cm) long and 1–2¼ inches (2.5–6 cm) wide, long-pointed at apex and shortpointed or rounded at base, not toothed on edges, slightly thickened and leathery, with three main veins including two long curved side veins from near base of midvein and swollen glands in angles, pinkish and showy when young, shiny green above and dull light green beneath.

Flower clusters (panicles) on slender stalks at leaf bases, 1½–3 inches (4–7.5 cm) long, branched. Flowers several, yellowish, small, ⅛ inch (3 mm) long and broad, composed of six-lobed calyx, nine stamens, and pistil with rounded ovary and short style.

Fruit (berry) ⅜ inch (1 cm) in diameter, green to black, with short greenish cuplike base and enlarged stalk, the thin flesh with spicy taste of camphor. Seed single, nearly ¼ inch (6 mm) in diameter, dark brown.

The wood is yellowish brown with darker streaks, lightweight (sp. gr. 0.45), soft, fine-textured, strongly scented, and takes a good polish. Elsewhere, it has served in cabinetwork, especially chests, because the odor is an insect repellent. A few trees have been cut in Hawaii and worked into chests and closet lining. Camphor gum and oil, used in medicine and industry, are prepared by steam distillation of leaf clippings and wood from plantations.

Planted as an ornamental and shade tree in Hawaii; elsewhere as windbreaks and hedges. On Oahu, Kauai, Lanai, and Maui, a total of 3600 trees are recorded as having been planted in the Forest Reserves. In several

wet forest areas, notably in Nuuanu Valley, dense thickets of this tree form an understory beneath Eucalyptus stands. It attains large size when grown as a plantation tree in the forest. There is a stand at about 1100 ft (335 m) elevation along Tantalus Drive, Oahu, that attests to this.

Grown in subtropical regions of southern continental United States from Florida to southern Texas along the Gulf, and in California, it has escaped and is recorded as naturalized. Uncommon in Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands.

Special areas

Foster, Tantalus

Champion

Height 83 ft (25.3 m), c.b.h. 22.7 ft (6.9 m), spread 100 ft (30.5 m). Ulupalakua, Maui (1968).

Range

Native of tropical Asia from eastern China to Vietnam, Taiwan, and Japan, and widely planted in tropical and subtropical regions.

Other common names

Japanese camphor-tree; alcanfor (Spanish)



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Twig with fruits, 1 X.