

# Patchouli Leaf and Powder Profile

## Also known as

Pogostemon cablin, Patchouly, Stink Weed, Pucha Pot, and Pucha-Pat

## Introduction

Most people know patchouli as the ever popular incense scent from the Sixties, when it seemed to be every flower child's favorite perfume. The scent has a reputation as an aphrodisiac, and is said to attract the opposite sex. It's slightly musty, pungent smell is unmistakable and pervasive, and it was often used as a fixative for other scents, or to mask more objectionable scents. Most people, however, are not aware of the other uses of patchouli. The furry-leafed shrub grows to about four feet in its native Malaysia, but can be grown as a houseplant throughout the world if you avoid the cold. Over the centuries, patchouli has had numerous medicinal uses. Among the conditions it has been used to treat are dysentery, diarrhea, colds without fevers, vomiting, and nausea. The essential oil may be used to treat acne, dry skin, fungal infections, dermatitis, dandruff and eczema. The fresh leaves can help aid healing in burns, and in aromatherapy, it is used to calm nerves and control appetite, relieve depression, stress and lack of sexual interest.

## Constituents

esquiterpenes patchoulol (35%) and bulnesene.

## Parts Used

Dried leaves, and the essential oil

## Typical Preparations

Essential oil, infusion of leaves as a tea (although rarely) in topical applications and as an incense.

## Summary

Patchouli enjoys the distinction of being both well-known and lesser known. Most are familiar with its scent and its uses in aromatherapy, but not with the wide range of conditions it may help. There is little conclusive research to support the use of patchouli in medicinal preparations, but its properties are well known. In addition to its medicinal and perfumery uses, patchouli also repels insects, and is often used in the east to scent bed linens and keep fleas and other pests at bay.

## Precautions

Its internal use is not recommended unless by a qualified practitioner

**Botanical: Pogostemon patchouli (PILL.)**

**Family: N.O. Labiatae**

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---**Synonym**---Pucha-pat.

---**Part Used**---The herb, yielding a volatile oil by distillation.

---**Habitat**---East and West Indies and Paraguay.

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---**Description**---This fragrant herb, with soft, opposite, egg-shaped leaves and square stems, grows from 2 to 3 feet in height, giving out the peculiar, characteristic odour of patchouli when rubbed. Its whitish flowers, tinged with purple, grow in both axillary and terminal spikes. The crop is cut two or three times a year, the leaves being dried and packed in bales and exported for distillation of the oil. The best oil is freshly distilled near the plantations. That obtained from leaves imported into Europe, often damaged and adulterated even up to 80 per cent, is inferior. It is used in coarser perfumes and in 'White Rose' and 'Oriental' toilet soaps. Although the odour is objectionable to some, it is widely-used both in Asia and India. Sachets are made of the coarsely-powdered leaves, and before its common use in Europe, genuine Indian shawls and Indian ink were distinguished by the odour, which has the unusual quality of improving with age. Hence the older oil is preferred by perfumers and used to confer more lasting properties upon other scents.

---**Constituents**---Oil of Patchouli is thick, the colour being brownish-yellow tinted green. It contains coerulein, the vivid blue compound found in matricaria, wormwood and other oils. It deposits a solid, or stearoptene, patchouli alcohol, leaving cadinene.

It is laevorotatory, with the specific gravity of 0.970 to 0.990 at 15 degrees C. (59 degrees F.).

---**Medicinal Action and Uses**---Its use is said to cause sometimes loss of appetite and sleep and nervous attacks. The Chinese, Japanese and Arabs believe it to possess prophylactic properties.

---**Other Species and Adulterations**---

*Java patchouli*, often grown in Indian gardens for home use, is a product of *Pogostemon Heyneanus*.

The inferior oil of Assam is from *Microtoena cymosa*.

Cubeb and cedar oils are said to be usual adulterants.