

King of Scents — Agarwood

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Overview of Agarwood

Agarwood is the resinous wood of a tree from *Aquilaria* and *Gyrinops* species, which is highly prized as a premium raw material used in fragrances and traditional medicines. The trees naturally grow in the forests of Southeast Asia (SEA), primarily distributed in countries namely India, Malaysia, Bhutan, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Sri Lanka. The history of agarwood stretches back to ancient times and its use has largely been associated with regional, cultural and religious beliefs. Agarwood is also considered as sacred. Due to its extremely high value, the species has been hunted down from its natural habitat in the forests, reducing its availability at an alarming rate. The two species are now considered endangered and have been listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) of Wild Fauna and Flora. Enforcement of CITES on agarwood put the activities of exporting and importing agarwood from the wild under very stringent control.

Ajmal has been on the forefront to engage with CITES and other entities to draft a regulation for differentiating between wild and harvested agarwood trees – paving the way to commercial harvesting by farmers for sustainability as well as to simplify rules and regulations. Today, millions of agarwood trees have been planted primarily in North East India by farmers with the help of AJMAL (see F-1). Agarwood plantations not only promise a sustainable supply of agarwood and its derivatives to the market but also help in conserving the near-extinct *Aquilaria* and *Gyrinops* species. It also generates employment and small business opportunities for people living in rural areas. Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia and Vietnam are promoting and encouraging plantation of agarwood trees. The number of agarwood trees planted in all its producing countries has increased in recent years due to awareness regarding the potential demand of agarwood among the industry players.

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