

Tilia = Linde

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FLORA IN SWITZERLAND

Tilia - Linde

Tilia species are large deciduous trees, reaching typically 20 to 40 metres tall. The Tilia's sturdy trunk stands like a pillar and the branches divide and subdivide and end in fine and thick branches. In summer these are profusely clothed with large leaves and the result is a dense head of abundant foliage. The leaves are heart-shaped and most are asymmetrical, and the tiny fruit, looking like peas, always hang attached to a ribbon-like, greenish yellow bract, whose function is to launch the ripened seed-clusters just a little beyond the parent tree.



A very old Tilia tree

In Europe, Tilia trees are known to have reached ages of up to 2,000 years. The Alte Linde tree of Naters, canton Valais, is mentioned in a document in 1357 and described by the writer at that time as already "magnam" (huge). A plaque at its foot mentions that in 1155 a Tilia tree was already on this spot.

The Tilia is recommended as an ornamental tree when a mass of foliage or a deep shade is desired. The tree produces fragrant and nectar-producing flowers, the medicinal herb lime blossom. They are very important honey

plants for beekeepers, producing a very pale but richly flavoured honey.

The flowers are also used for herbal tea and tinctures; this kind of use is particularly popular in Europe. The dried flowers are mildly sweet and sticky. Lime flower tea has a pleasing taste, due to the aromatic volatile oil found in the flowers. They are used medicinally for colds, cough, fever, infections, inflammation, high blood pressure, headache, and as a diuretic, antispasmodic, and sedative. The flowers were added to baths to quell hysteria, and



Lime blossom

steeped as a tea to relieve anxiety-related indigestion, irregular heartbeat, and vomiting. The leaves are used to promote sweating to reduce fevers. The wood is used for liver and gall-bladder disorders and cellulitis.

The timber of Tilia trees is soft and easily worked; it has very little grain. It is a popular wood for model building and intricate carving. Especially in Germany it was the classic wood for sculpture from the Middle Ages onwards.

In old Slavic mythology, the Tilia was considered a sacred tree. To this day, the Tilia tree is a national emblem of Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic. In the Slavic Orthodox Christian world, limewood was the preferred wood for panel icon painting.

The Tilia was also a highly symbolic and hallowed tree in pre-Christian Germanic mythology. Originally, local communities assembled not only to celebrate and dance under a Tilia tree, but to hold their judicial meetings there in order to restore justice and peace. It was believed that the tree would help unearth the truth. Thus the tree became associated with jurisprudence even after Christianization, such as in the case of the Gerichtslinde, and verdicts in rural Germany were frequently returned sub tilia (under the Tilia) until the Age of Enlightenment. In German folklore, the Tilia tree is the "tree of lovers."