

Strange Facts of Strange Trees

One of the South American acacia trees manufactures electricity for its protection—or, more properly speaking, it is an electric dynamo. On touching it, one receives a shock so distinct that he is not desirous of coming nearer. Scientists are now working on the theory that certain electrically charged trees exchange electrical or magnetic impulses through the air.

Scientists admit that trees have their laws of marriage and courtship. The Indian fig tree is such an ardent lover that he will actually take on the form of a vine if his mate chances to grow a distance from him, and by this means reach out his arms, that he may embrace her and powder her face with his perfumed pollen.

In western India there is a tree that blossoms only in the dark. For some reason, possibly because as ordinarily seen it is of plain and desolate appearance, it is called the sorrowful tree. Every evening in the year it breaks into bloom, but with the rising sun sheds or folds up its flowers.

The Germans used the seed of the *Sabailla*, botanically known as *Schoenocaulon officinali*, for the manufacture of the lachrymatory and asphyxiating gases stored in their "weeping bombs." The seeds of this strange and interesting plant or tree are in form and color like our oats; and stored, they emit a piquant smell so strong as to make the eyes water copiously; they also make breathing very difficult and painful.

The cocoanut palm is an example of a single tree which can be made to supply all the needs of a not too luxurious member of society. In certain islands of the southern seas this prolific plant furnishes the natives with the wood from which they build their houses, their boats and their utensils. When the leaves are young they are eaten. When they are old, they are woven and braided into hats, baskets, cloth, fans, bedding, paper

and thatch. The ribs of the mature leaves are converted into arrows, spears, brooms, torches and paddles. Out of the flowers come wine, vinegar and sugar. The fruit makes a delicious food, and its husks yield oil, cord and matting. Even the roots are sometimes used for food.

The sweet gum, sometimes called gum-amber, actually plants seeds within itself. The tree first grows hollow within, and then the seeds find their way into the hollow. When the tree is ready to die, the young take up the life thread and, pushing their way through crevices in the bark, burst the maternal trunk asunder.

The oak is the most common tree in northern United States.

The palm tree has for centuries been conceded the emblem of victory.

The wild cherry, with its beautiful red-bronze bark, is a miser. It is so niggardly that it can not bring itself to part with its own dead branches but retains them indefinitely.

Scientists declare that not a few trees have become extinct as a result of inter-marriage with foreign trees, or different species. In some cases a healthy hybrid is produced (as Burbank's plumcot) but more often there is no offspring.

The "Sneeze wood" tree of South Africa has a unique way of protecting itself against enemies. Its wood is light brown in color, runs very close grained, is so hard as to sink in water, is bitter to the taste, and emits a microscopic dust on being sawed or cut. No insect or worm will touch it and men who handle it are continually sneezing.

The sandalwood is termed the "perfume wood" tree, although it is not alone in this quality, as indicated by our own sassafras and cedar.