

Scrub forest with smoke bush



Smoke bush (*Cotinus coggygria*) occurs in warm, dry, calcareous soil environment. The northern border of the spread of this species is the Pannonian Basin. It is such a common plant here, that the numerous bushes paint a major part of the hillside in flaming red in around October. The increasing population of smoke bush has been observed at the expense of sod over the past decades. By decoction of the leaves anti-inflammatory and antiseptic remedy can be prepared. The Hungarian tanners used during centuries the tanning material extracted from smoketree leaves to treat skins of animals when producing leather. From its wood yellow dye can be prepared also known in folk art. Besides the diverse benefits of the plant, its small seeds seem to be petty, unlike to other plants of this family: mango, ambarella, pistacia and cashew.



Today the extract of smokebush leaves is commonly used in mouthwashes, and it is also used by the perfume industry. By rubbing the leaves soft orange scent can be smelled.



Its remarkable, cloud-like panicles bloom in June, and its hair-like structures on the flower pedicels remain there all summer long, from which the common names smoke bush, smoke tree or wig tree derive.

From the prolific flowers 2-3 mm long, ovoid, initially red, when ripen brown drupaceous fruits develop. The hair-like structures on the flower pedicels help the seeds to be dispersed by the wind.



Treated animal skin was already used in prehistoric age. This is the oldest shelter material. In ancient times the technology was improved by introducing tanning. The compounds from smoketree leaves used in the traditional leather production result in fine, soft, smooth coloured, light leather.

Today's leather tanneries use vegetable tannins in huge quantities, extracted from tree barks very rich in tannic acid (e.g. *Mimosa catechu*). Nevertheless the natural tannins are mixed with synthetic tanning materials to reduce costs and shorten the production time. These materials are in many places discharged directly into rivers, therefore leather production is an extremely polluting industry.