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Lebanese cedar

## **From Egyptian Mummies to Solomon's Temple: Lebanese Cedar**

### *The most priced wood of the antiquity*

There's no wood having a longer history than that of cedar wood. Cedars are coniferous trees of the genus *Cedrus*, related to the Firs (*Abies*). They are native to the mountains of the western Himalaya and the Mediterranean region. The Mediterranean type grows at 1,000-2,200 m altitudes. The most famous Lebanese cedar (*C. libani*) is found in Lebanon, Southern Turkey, Western Syria and Cyprus (in the mountains of Alger and Morocco another form grows). Despite being the symbol of the Lebanon, represented even on the national flag, today this tree is rare in the Lebanese mountains. The most beautiful exemplars are the Cedars of God in Bsharri and Barouk forest national reserves, at the altitude of over 1,800 m (6,000 ft). They can bypass 50 m (166 ft) in height, but the perimeter of their trunks can be over 10 m (33 ft) and the branches form a very large treetop. The cedar has a very slow growth: it needs 200 years to reach maturity, about the size of the tree of the Lebanese flag, and the oldest individuals can be 1,200-1,500 years old. The slow development of the cedar ensures the extreme quality of its wood, which triggered their intense exploitation over the centuries. This timber was especially appreciated amongst the ship builders, as the cedar wood is extremely resistant to the action of the water, and Phoenicians, the famous navigators of the antiquity that inhabited today's Lebanon, built their trade and military ships, as well as their houses and temples from cedar wood. Archaeologists found cedar made ships over 4,400 years old perfectly conserved, that even kept the specific scent... The Egyptians used its resin for mummification and its sawdust was found in the pharaoh's tombs. Jewish priests were ordered by Moses to use the bark of the Lebanon Cedar in circumcision and treatment of leprosy. Jews used to burn Lebanese cedar wood on the Mount of Olives to announce the beginning of a new year. The cedar wood was used in the construction of King Solomon's temple in Jerusalem, 3,000 years ago, being provided by Phoenician King Hiram of Tyre. Cedar wood was also highly appreciated by Romans, Greeks, Persians, Assyrians and Babylonians. Furniture craftsmen also sought the cedar wood for the scent it expelled inside the buildings. Cedar wood and cedar oil is known to be a natural repellent to moths, hence cedar made hope chests were preferred. Extensive reforestation of cedar is carried out currently in the Mediterranean region, particularly Turkey. Many coniferous species from the cypress family, growing naturally in North America and Eastern Asia, are erroneously called cedars just because they expel a powerful scent like the real cedars, even if their wood cannot be compared to the real stuff.