

Saussurea obvallata



Family: Compositae
(Asteraceae)

Local/common names:
Himalayan Lotus, Sah-du
Goh-ghoo (Tibetan),
Brahmakamal (Sanskrit)

Trade name: Brahmakamal

Profile:

Saussurea is a genus of about 300 species of flowering plants in the Asteraceae family, with the highest diversity in the alpine regions of the Himalayas. *Saussurea obvallata*, also known as Brahmakamal in Sanskrit, is named after Brahma, the Hindu God of creation. The species is the state flower of Uttarakhand. It holds medicinal and religious value in the Himalayas. From the market point of view, the plant is important for the trade of its flowers. Due to unsustainable harvesting of flowers from the wild, the species has become endangered.

Habitat and ecology: The plant occurs throughout a wide range extending from elevations of 3000-4500 m. It is found on alpine, grassy slopes with rocky bases and near streams. The species is commonly associated with *Anaphalis triplinervis*. The species can be seen in Nepal, Bhutan, India, southwest China, Pakistan and North Myanmar. In India, it is found in the Hatta valley, Hemkund, Roopkund, Valley of Flowers, Sahasra tal, Dronagiri, Neelkanth, Tungnath (Garhwal), Pindari, Khalia top, Chipla Dhura and Ram Valley in Uttarakhand in the Central Himalayas. This species has also been found near North Pullu nala in Nubra valley of Leh, Giabong in Kinnaur and in pockets in Komic (Spiti) in the western Himalayas. The plant is also found in the Pandhan-Chamu-Plarchan stretch in the Eastern Himalayas.

Morphology: *Saussurea obvallata* is a perennial herb growing up to a height of 30 cm. It is a striking herb with large, pale yellow, boat-shaped, papery bracts surrounding the dense cluster of flower heads. The flower heads are several, in a dense umbel-like cluster, each 1.5-2.5 cm long and with involucre bracts with black margins and nearly hairless tips. Several encircling, ovate, bristly-margined, translucent and conspicuously veined bracts overlap the flowers. The leaves are oblong-lanceolate, blunt, toothed, lower stalked, upper half-clasping with the blade continuing in a stout stem 15-45 cm long.

Distinguishing features: The plant has large, glossy, translucent, pale yellow, papery and boat-shaped bracts surrounding a dense cluster of dark purple flower heads.

Life cycle: Flowering is from June-September whereas seed collection is from September-October. Senescence takes place in October.

Uses: The inflorescence is regarded highly sacred and offered to local deities. Usually, the flower is collected from distant localities and sold to pilgrims. This species has several medicinal uses as well. The entire plant is used in Tibetan medicine as it is considered to have healing properties. It is used in the treatment of paralysis of the limbs and cerebral ischemia. In Tawang, the plant is used in the dried powdered or paste form to cure skin diseases. Also, the species finds its use in the treatment of urinary trouble, cold, cough and digestive ailments.

Market rate: It is sold at the rate of Rs. 5-10/- per flower stalk.