

Rhododendron arboreum



Family: Ericaceae

Local/common names:

Burans, Bras, Barah-ke-phool, Rhodo-flowers, Bras, Ardawal, Mandal, Chiu, Aru, Broa, Etok, Chacheon, Kamri. Tin-saw

Trade name: Bras

Profile:

The state tree of Uttaranchal, *Rhododendron arboreum*, belonging to the family Ericaceae, is the most widely distributed tree in the Himalayas. The species has many derivatives. The Ericaceae family consists mainly of shrubs and has 125 genera and 3500 species. About half the species of this family come under the genus *Rhododendron*. This species was discovered by James Edward Smith, a British botanist. *Rhododendron arboreum* is the best-known species amongst all the *Rhododendron* species.

Habitat and ecology: *Rhododendron arboreum* is found over a wide range of altitudes, and in many different forms. The plant is found in the Himalayas from Kashmir to Bhutan and in the hills of Assam and Manipur at an altitude of 1200-4000 m. In Himachal Pradesh, it is found in Chamba, Kangra, Kullu, Shimla, Mandi, Kinnaur and Sirmour districts in a sporadic or scattered form. It is quite common in the Shimla catchment, Gallu forest in Jogindernagar and Kalaghat in Solan. It forms dense forests in the region and is common in shrubberies.

Morphology: It is a robust tree, growing up to 15 m, with reddish-brown bark. The flowers are blood red or pink to white, the latter usually found at higher altitudes, in large compact clusters of about 20 flowers that are 10-13 cm across. The corolla is tubular, bell-shaped, 4-5 cm long and wide and 5-lobed. The stamens are 10 in number and the filaments are white. Capsules are oblong and curved. The leaves are 10-20 cm in length, oblong to lanceolate, with grooved mid-vein and lateral veins deeply impressed above, glossy green undersides with thin or thick felted hairs, white, fawn, cinnamon or rusty-brown in colour. The leaves are crowded towards the end of the branches.

Distinguishing features: The flowers are blood red, or pink to white, in large compact clusters of about 20 flowers. The corolla is tubular, bell-shaped, 4-5 cm long and wide, 5-lobed.

Life cycle: The plant is in flowering stage in March-April and fruiting takes place between June-September.

Uses: Wood is used for burning, but mainly as fuel wood and charcoal. Wood is also used for making plates, kukri, tool-handles, and boxes and is also used as plywood. The bark is used in the preparation of a snuff. The extracts of flowers are applied to the forehead as a remedy for headache. The extracts of leaves, stem and bark cause hypotension in rats and inhibit intestinal movements in rabbits. The acetone, chloroform and a resinous fraction from the alcoholic extracts of leaves depress respiration. The flowers are used to treat diarrhoea and dysentery. The fresh petals are used in 'chutneys'. The flowers and leaves are tied to long ropes made of *munja* grass and tied around the houses and temples as decorations during the 'Baisakhi festival'. The flowers are collected and processed into juice, which has gained market popularity as Rhodojuice. Rhodo flower's juice is used as a stimulant or rejuvenant. It is also a useful remedy for stomach disorders. The flowers are used for offering to deities in hill temples.

Market rate: The flowers are sold at Rs.600/- per kg.