



Scientific Name:

Tetraclinis articulata

English:

Sandarac Gum Tree

Maltese:

is-siġra tal-għargħar

The Sandarac Gum tree is an evergreen tree, which can grow up to 15m in height. Its flattened, delicate branches are covered with small scale-like leaves, and bear both female and male cones. The female cones are woody and around 15mm long. They are divided into four segments, hence the scientific name *Tetraclinis*, which literally translates to 'four scales'. On the other hand, the male cones are smaller – around 3mm in length, and found at the branches' edges. The female cones, which occur almost all year round, contain small winged seeds, a feature which aids in the dispersal of the seeds themselves by allowing them to hover in the air for longer distances. Male cones appear in winter.

The tree may be found along crevices in arid, karstic slopes, and gorges with adequate amount of soil. Occasionally it is also found in garrigues. Despite such habitats being quite common in the Maltese Islands, this species is at present relatively rare in the wild, unlike some hundred years ago, where it used to cover much larger areas. However, it is also seemingly on the increase in the wild, and is also being used for landscaping.

The Sandarac Gum tree has been declared as Malta's national tree in 1992 and is a protected tree under national legislation. In this regard, one cannot take, prune, fell, uproot (amongst other actions) specimens, unless in possession of a permit from relevant Authority. Tree Protected Areas have been also designated under national legislation to cover areas where this species is found growing in the wild. Meanwhile, under the EU Habitats Directive, Member States are required to designate Natura 2000 sites for habitats based on this species, so as to support the maintenance and improvement of the status of such habitat types. Malta has designated such sites accordingly.

