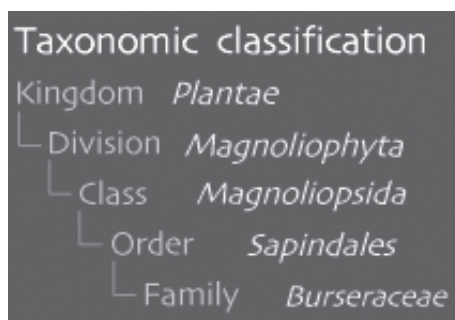


## Aromatic copals

### Biodiversity

At least 12,000 species of resin-producing plants are recognized worldwide, of which around 500 are conifers while the rest are flowering plants. These aromatic plants belong to different families, among which is the *Burseraceae*, family, which includes the copales and cuajjotes.



The family includes 18 genera and hundreds of species documented since antiquity as major sources of resins and essential oils.

### The genus *Bursera*

Copals belong to the genus *Bursera*, which has about 100 species distributed exclusively in the Americas.

Most of these plants are trees that measure between 4 and 12 m, although some reach up to 30 m, while others are shrubs of between 1 and 3 m in height. The crown is normally wider than the overall height.

All lose their leaves during the dry season of the year and flower at the end of it. Generally they are dioecious, i.e. the male and female flowers are produced by different individuals, and these develop prior to or at the same time as the new leaves.

Within *Bursera*, there are two natural groups or sections: the *Bursera* section, including the mulatos and cuajjotes, and the *bullockia* section, which includes the copals.

In the *bullockia* section, there are two distinct groups: *copallifera* and *glabrifolia*, with the latter being the most widely distributed group within *Bursera*.

### Indigenous Classification

Pre-Hispanic classifications recognized two groups among the species of *Bursera*, the cuajjote ("quáuitl" = tree, "xiotl" = leprosy) which corresponds to species of the *Bursera* group, distinguished by their peeling bark, and copal ("copalli" = incense) which corresponds to those of the *bullockia* group. In the Nahuatl language, the word "copal" applied to any resin-producing plant which gave off an aroma when burned.



Content: David Espinosa

Illustration: Rafael Ruíz

Design: Rosalba Becerra