

Introduction The strawberry tree (*Arbutus andrachne*) belongs to the heath family (*Ericaceae*), which comprises about 125 genera. The genus *Arbutus*, includes 11 species mainly distributed in western Europe, the Mediterranean region, Atlantic Islands, western parts of north America and Mexico. Two species, namely *Arbutus andrachne* and *Arbutus unedo*, are indigenous to Cyprus.

Description The strawberry tree is an evergreen large bush or small tree, 3-5 (-12) m high, with a broad, irregular crown. The bark is smooth, reddish, peeling off annually in early summer to expose a pale greyish, or greenish underlayer. The leaves are alternate, simple, leathery, broadly elliptic, 4-10 x 2-6 cm; the margins are usually entire, but sometimes serrate in juvenile shoots; they are dark shining green above, distinctly glaucous below. The flowers are white or pale green, in terminal panicles, with a campanulate corolla. It flowers from March to May. The fruit is a reddish to orange-red, globose,



Flowers

fleshy berry, 10-15 mm in diameter, with the exocarp covered with small rounded outgrowths and it is edible. It ripens by the end of October to December.



Fruits

Distribution-Habitat In Cyprus the strawberry tree is common in all mountain regions at elevations from 100 m to 1500 m. It is very common in the Akamas Peninsula, on the Troodos mountains, in the Limassol forest and on Pentadactylos mountains. It occurs in *Pinus brutia*, *Cupressus sempervirens* or *Juniperus phoenicea* woodland and maquis on rocky calcareous or igneous rocks. Indigenous to East Mediterranean countries from Albania to Palestine and from Crimea to the Caucasus.

History-Uses Theophrastus refers to this plant with the name "Andrachni" (*Plants History, 1,9,3 and 3,16,4*). A very attractive shrub, which is not as frequently used in plantings as it should be. The fruits are edible (by humans and birds) and a special liqueur is made from their juice. The wood has been widely used in the past to make chairs and small items, mainly because of its very attractive red colour. It is also used for charcoal production and as a fuelwood. It thrives in well drained, light and fertile soils and it is propagated mainly by seeds.

Conservation and Management The strawberry tree is very common in all mountain regions, especially in forest areas and areas covered with maquis type of vegetation. It is considered as an integral part of some habitat types of Annex I, of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), such as the mediterranean pine forests with endemic pine species, the shrub and low forest vegetation with *Quercus alnifolia*, woodlands with *Quercus infectoria*, *Cupressus* forests and endemic forests with *Juniperus* species. A large proportion of the areas occupied by these habitat types, has been included in the *Natura 2000* network of European special areas of conservation and therefore the protection of the strawberry tree is secured. Its ability to coppice freely from the root and therefore re-establish itself, after fire or cutting, provides better chances to the plant to survive under these influences.



Strawberry tree in a bushy form

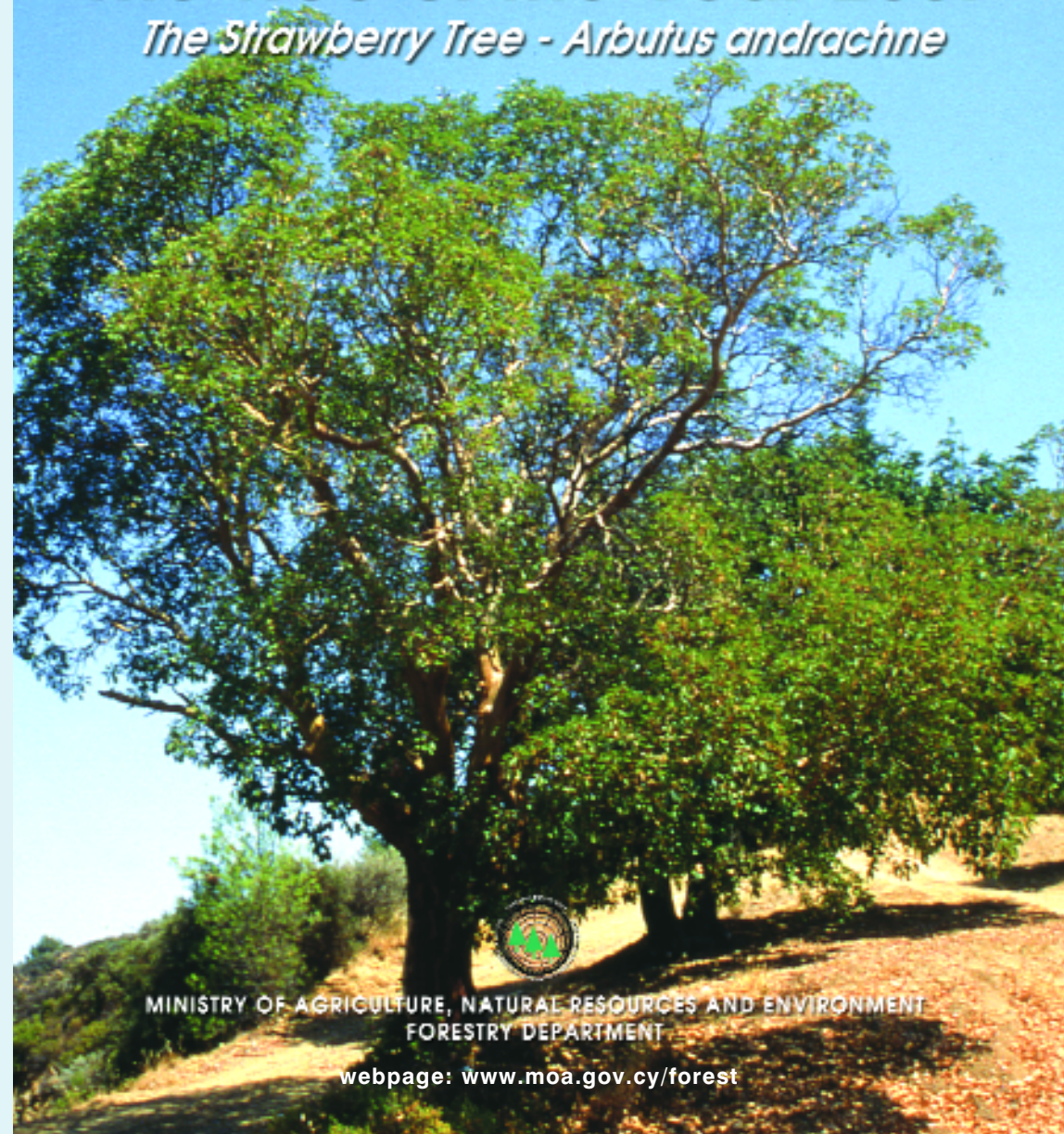


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