

# Living as a linden tree

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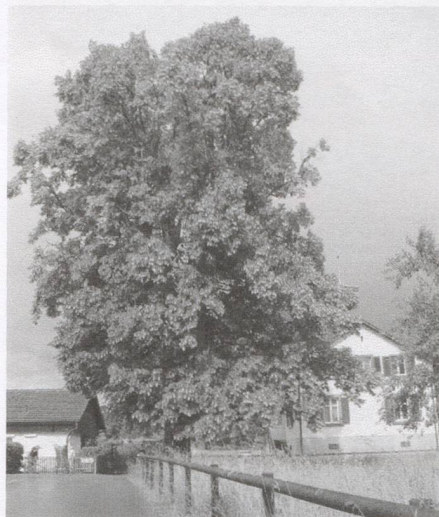
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## Swiss Watching

### Living as a Linden Tree by Carolyn Lane, July 2014

*Not that I want to be a god or a hero. Just to change into a tree, grow for ages, not hurt anyone.*  
Czesław Miłosz



The linden leading into our little road at Altenrhein

#### **The tree I would be is a Linden.**

Over the summer weeks, Rorschach has been awash with perfume. There's a row of linden trees down by the wharf, but their fragrance was still dense a couple of streets back, drifting over the old stone buildings, joining up with the perfume from those in the redeveloped square – and taking me back to the first time I ever smelled linden.

I know the tree I would want to become is a Linden. Mine wouldn't be the first such metamorphosis: As Ovid tells the old story of Baucis and Philemon, Zeus changed her into a linden and him into an oak when the time came for them both to die. It can be a very long life thereafter: linden trees can last hundreds of years, some are even said to be over a thousand.

#### **As a Linden (aka Lime, Basswood, Tilia), I could**

##### **Make music**

The wood is fine, light, and easily worked, with good acoustic properties. You'll find it in guitar bodies and necks, recorders, drum shells...

##### **Make art**

Especially in Germany, linden was the classic wood for sculpture from the Middle Ages onwards – you see it in many elaborate altarpieces. In the Slavic Orthodox Christian world, it was the preferred wood for panel icon

painting, because it could be sanded very smooth, and, once seasoned, was resistant to warping. Wikipedia references the icons by Andrei Rublev, including the Holy Trinity (Hospitality of Abraham), and The Savior, in the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. When we saw them, I was looking at the surface. Now I'd be trying to see beneath!

#### **Bring Justice and Peace – and dancing**

Way back, the tree literally and figuratively at the centre of a village would be a linden. There, the community would gather not only for festivities, but also to hold their thing –judicial assemblies and courts to restore justice and peace. It was believed that the tree would help unearth the truth. Right up till the 18th century, verdicts in rural Germany were frequently returned sub tilia (under the linden). So the central linden tree could be both a **Tanzlinde** "dance linden", and a **Gerichtslinde** "court linden".

##### **Heal**

The flowers, leaves, wood, and charcoal are all used for medicinal purposes. The flowers include flavonoids (which act as antioxidants) and volatile oils. Linden flowers are used in herbalism for colds, cough, fever, infections, inflammation, high blood pressure, headache (particularly migraine), and as a diuretic, antispasmodic (reduces smooth muscle spasm along the digestive tract), and sedative. Now it seems the flowers might also protect the liver.

The wood is used for liver and gallbladder disorders and cellulitis (inflammation of the skin and surrounding soft tissue). That wood burned to charcoal is ingested to treat intestinal disorders and used topically to treat oedema or infection such as cellulitis or ulcers of the lower leg. Branches used to be cut and brought inside if there was an ill person or animal – but only then. Nobody was supposed to break or cut the tree unless they really needed its help.

##### **Delight the bees**

The linden blossom is a favourite for honey-bees, and the pale richly flavoured honey is a favourite with people.

##### **Protect**

Many folk believe the linden to be a holy tree. Slavic people used to plant linden close to churches, houses, and



important meeting places. They believed that lightening would not hit the holy tree, so people hid underneath it during thunderstorms.

#### **Be useful round the house**

Linden wood makes great window blinds and shutters, and the inner bark provides fibre which was used by, among others, the Ainu people of Japan to weave their traditional clothing.

#### **Lend my name**

Everywhere, pubs, streets, and towns are named for the Linden. But it's also the name for the month of June in Croatia, and July in Poland, and in Croatian currency, the cent-equivalent is called a lipa (Croat for linden). Even more – the tree is a national emblem for Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Serbia.

#### **Make perfume**

And wouldn't you know it... my summer-daily perfume, Lacoste Femme, has linden blossom at its heart.

#### **Look after lovers**

In German folklore, the linden tree is the "tree of lovers." Perhaps it's the heart-shaped leaves...

##### **Sources:**

Carolyn Lane is a well known contributor to the Helvetia magazine. Carolyn and her partner Mani Züst travel Europe every New Zealand summer from their base in Altenrhein in Switzerland. Carolyn has kindly allowed us to publish this extract from her inspiring blog which can be found on <http://carolynlane.wordpress.com/>. Her main sources of information for this blog were [www.fragrantica.com](http://www.fragrantica.com), and of course Wikipedia.

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