

Acer glabrum

[Synonyms : *Acer neomexicanum*]

ROCKY MOUNTAIN MAPLE is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to western North America it has small, yellowish-green flowers and leaves that turn red-orange and yellow in Autumn.

It is also known as Bark maple, California mountain maple, Douglas maple, Dwarf maple, *Javor lysý* (Czech), *Kahler Ahorn* (German), Mountain maple, New Mexico maple, Rock maple, Shrubby maple, Sierra maple, Soft maple, and Western mountain maple.

Glabrum is Latin (hairless, bald) meaning ‘hairless or smooth’ with reference to the leaves. Dried, crushed leaves were used by the Blackfoot North American Indian tribe to flavour preserved meat.

Both the Thompson Indians and the Okanagan-Colville made snowshoes from the wood. The latter also used it to make cooking tongs and the drying racks they needed for smoking food, while the Bella Coola fashioned the bark into spoons.

The bark was also of use to the Blackfoot who made it into paint containers. Other small items furnished by rocky mountain maple, included wooden tepee pegs and drum hoops.

Rocky mountain maple was sought out by several tribes to aid them in hunting and fishing. The wood was made into bows by both the Thompson and the Isleta tribes – and it seems that this was particularly respected by the Okanagan-Colville who chose it for a child’s first bow. The latter tribe made spear handles out of this wood and the Montana Indian tribe made fish net hoops from young twigs.

Records tell of one unusual way that the Bella Coola felled trees. Apparently they tied straight stems of rocky mountain maple round the base of the tree destined for the ‘chop’ and, after setting these alight, left them to burn until the tree came down. The Okanagan-Colville used the wood as fuel.

Although authorities have also recorded some ‘medicinal’ uses made by various North American Indian tribes many appear to have been influenced by rocky mountain maple’s participation in tribal ritual and superstition.

The young shoots are edible and can be prepared like asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*). The dried, ground inner bark has proved to be quite versatile. It has been used locally as a thickening agent for soups, it has been added to cereals in breadmaking and has provided emergency rations when food has been scarce.

As with those of close relatives, the leaves were thought to have some preservative qualities and were wrapped around apples (*Malus*) and some root crops before storage.

The wood has been gathered locally for fuel.

The foliage is browsed by deer and elk, and cattle and sheep.

Rocky mountain maple has been cultivated in some places specifically to control soil erosion. Medicinally, a wood and bark decoction has been taken locally to counter nausea.