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### *Acer negundo*

[Synonyms : *Negundo aceroides*, *Negundo fraxinifolium*, *Negundo negundo*, *Rulac negundo*, *Rulac texanum*]

**BOX ELDER** is a deciduous tree. Native from eastern North America to Guatemala, it has small yellowish-green flowers (on separate trees) and leaflets that turn yellow and brown in Autumn.

It is also known as Ashleaf maple, Ash-leaved maple, Ash maple, *Asklönn* (Swedish), Black ash, Box alder, Box elder maple, California boxelder, Californian boxelder, Cut-leaved maple, *Érable giguère* (French-Canadian), *Eschen-Ahorn* (German), *Eschenblättriger Ahorn* (German), Inland boxelder, *Jasanojavor peřenolistý* (Czech), *Javor jasanolistý* (Czech), *Javorovec jasanolistý* (Czech), *Javorovec jasenolistý* (Slav), Manitoba maple, Maple, Maple-ash, *Nahosh* (Winnebago North American Indian), Negundo, Negundo maple, *Osako* (Pawnee North American Indian), Plane tree, Red river maple, *Saarnivaahtera* (Finnish), Soft maple, Stinking ash, Sugar ash, *Tashkada* (Dakota North American Indian), Three-leaved maple, Water ash, Western boxelder, and *Zhaba-ta-zho* (Omaha and Ponca North American Indian).

Warning – some authorities query a possibility that the tree could cause allergic breathing difficulties, and the pollen oil can cause dermatitis.

*Negundo* refers to the leaf shape and is said to be derived ultimately from a Sanskrit and Bengali name.

Outside the range of the sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*) the sap tapped from the trunk has provided a source of sugar for some tribes including not only the Kiowa but also the Dakota, Omaha, Pawnee, Ponca and Winnebago tribes. Other tribes such as the Chiricahua Apaches, the Mescalero and the Apache boiled the inner bark to get the sugar crystals for use as a sweetener (which is less sweet than that from the sugar maple). The Montana Indian tribe used the boiled or frozen sap as a sweet syrup, and the Chippewa made a drink from a mixture of the saps of the box elder and the sugar maple.

The weak, box elder wood was used in different ways by several American Indian tribes. The Kiowa burnt the wood on altar fires during Peyote ceremonies, and the Cheyenne burnt it during Sundance rituals. In addition to burning wood on ceremonial fires, box elder charcoal was used by both the Omaha and the Dakota tribes (often with a red colouring matter obtained from the bark) for ceremonial body painting and tattooing. Some tribes, including the Montana Indian, made pipe stems from twigs and the Western Keres made them into prayer sticks.

North American tribes also used this soft, lightweight wood in more mundane situations. It provided the Omaha with material for the tubes of bellows, and was used by the Cheyenne for making bowls. More specifically the burls or knots in large trunks were chosen by the Montana Indian tribe for fashioning bowls, dishes – and pipestems, and they also used them to make drums. Apart from ceremonial fire the Cheyenne also burnt the wood as fuel for cooking meat. The creamy-white wood has been used for inlaying on furniture too (often in combination with cherry wood, *Prunus avium*, or mahogany, *Swietenia mahagoni*).

Medicinally, some American Indian tribes including the Chippewa and the Meskwaki used a

decoction of the inner bark to cause vomiting.

This wood can still be used today for making charcoal and paper pulp, as well as inexpensive furniture, house interiors, tool handles, barrels, boxes, crates and packing cases. It can also be burnt as fuel.