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*Alnus rhombifolia*

[Synonyms : *Alnus californica*, *Alnus rhombifolia* var. *bernardina*]

**WHITE ALDER** is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to western North America it has yellow and reddish-green catkins.

It is also known as Alder, Mountain alder, and Sierra alder.

The flowers are pollinated by the wind.

Warning – fresh inner bark can be poisonous and can cause vomiting. These properties are neutralised once the inner bark has been dried.

*Rhombifolia* means ‘with rhombic- or diamond-shaped leaves’.

The dried inner bark was eaten by the North American Costanoan Indian tribe.

Like some of its close relatives it was also a source of various dyes. The inner bark was used for this purpose by the Karok Indians, the outer bark provided dye for the Mendocino Indian tribe, and the juice was used by the Costanoans. The Wailaki used fresh outer bark which they chewed to obtain a red dye – and the smoke from burning bark yellowed buckskin for the Kawaiisu tribe.

An unusual application has been recorded for the Thompson Indians who apparently obtained a scent from the stems. While the Mendocino Indian tribe were perhaps a little more pragmatic in many people’s eyes as they made arrows from young shoots and used the wood as tinder. The roots provided the Karok tribe with material for basketry.

For medicinal purposes records suggest that white alder was probably of greatest value to the Mendocino Indian tribe which seems to have used it for the greatest range of treatments including remedies for diarrhoea, haemorrhaging and stomach ache, the easement of childbirth and for healing burns, as well as the means of causing vomiting or perspiration. Some of the Pomo tribe found a decoction of bark was useful in treating some skin disorders especially on babies.

White alder’s presence in the wild indicates water in the tree’s proximity.

The tree is sometimes planted as an ornamental today on wet sites.

Locally the wood has been used for turning, veneering and making furniture, woodenware and other small items but principally it has been a source of fuel.