

Amelanchier alnifolia

[Synonyms : *Amelanchier alnifolia* var. *pumila*, *Amelanchier basalticola*, *Amelanchier cuneata*, *Amelanchier florida*, *Amelanchier glabra*, *Amelanchier polycarpa*, *Amelanchier pumila*, *Aronia alnifolia*, *Pyrus alnifolia*]

NORTHWESTERN JUNE BERRY is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to north-western North America it has spikes of small creamy-white flowers and leaves that turn red, orange, bronze and yellow in Autumn.

It is also known as Alder-leaved serviceberry, Dwarf serviceberry, *Erlenblättrige Felsenbirne* (German), *Grovsågad häggmispel* (Swedish), Juneberry, *Marja-tuomipihlaja* (Finnish), Mountain juneberry, *Muchovník olšolistý* (Czech), Northwestern serviceberry, Pacific serviceberry, Pigeonberry, Rocky Mountain blueberry, Rocky Mountain servicetree, Sarvice, Sarviceberry, Saskatoon, Saskatoon berry, Saskatoon serviceberry, *Sen häggmispel* (Swedish), Serviceberry, Shadberry, Shadblow, Shadbush, *Västamerikansk häggmispel* (Swedish), Western service, Western serviceberry, and Western shadbush.

The flowers are pollinated by bees. The palatability of the fruit seems to vary from region to region.

Warning – some authorities indicate that the foliage is potentially poisonous for ruminant browsing animals such as cattle, deer and sheep, particularly when the plant is flowering.

Alnifolia is made up of the genus name *Alnus* and Latin *-folia* (leaved) components meaning ‘with leaves like those of that (alder) genus’.

A source of food for many North American Indians the fruit were viewed as a staple for several tribes especially the Blackfoot Indians and some of the Okanagan-Colville. They and the Thompson tribe also harvested the white-frosted, purple-black berries as a cash crop which was bartered with neighbours and tribes further afield. The fruit were eaten raw, made into various puddings, preserved as jam or added to soups and stews by both the Blackfoot and Montana Indian tribes, eaten as snacks (when fresh by men in the Blackfoot tribe, or sun-dried by some of the Cree) used as a sweetener by the Thompson and Okanagan-Colville Indians and even made into a kind of porridge by the Atsugewi. In addition the fruit were an ingredient in a pemmican mixture (pounded buffalo meat, the chewy ‘iron rations’ of travellers in the North American west) prepared by the Great Basin Indian tribe and the Blackfoot and some of the Cree tribe, and they were also dried for future use (in Winter or as emergency rations) by the Ute, Great Basin Indian, Dakota, Klamath, Blackfoot, Thompson, some of the Cree, the Karok, Montana Indian, Okanagan-Colville, Atsugewi, Flathead and Gosiute tribes. Apart from those already mentioned records show that this larder was also familiar (mainly as fresh fruit) to the Salish, Omaha, Ponca, Winnebago, Saanich, Bella Coola, Hesquiat, Kitasoo, Mendocino Indian, Shuswap, Modesse, some of the Kwakiutl and the Navajo tribes. One unusual culinary application has been noted in some records. Apparently some of the Cree tribe boiled 4 inch long sticks (split and bark removed) in sturgeon oil in order to preserve the latter when it was stored.

The importance of northwestern juneberry to the Blackfoot tribe could well be indicated by the fact that it also featured in their ceremonial activities. The fruit were not only eaten as a berry soup at formal feasts but also played a role in ritual performed with forked sticks

also cut from the shrub.

Stems provided the Gosiute tribe with pliable fibre for basketry, as well as some of the Cree and the Karok and Maidu Indians. The Okanagan-Colville tribe used the stems to make rope and Dakota Indians formed them into hoops which they then covered in leather and used in a game.

Continuing the game theme the Dakota tribes (as well as the Omaha, Ponca, Winnebago and Pawnee Indians) also used the hard tough wood to make popgun pistons. For the Crow tribe the wood meant teepee stakes and pins, and both the Thompson and Okanagan-Colville Indians used the wood to make various tools. However the most popular use for it seems to have been as arrow shafts for hunting and fishing – and the Flathead, Karok, Mendocino Indian, Thompson, Winnebago, Ponca, Dakota, Gosiute, Salish, Okanagan-Colville, Montana Indian, Shuswap and Omaha Indian tribes were devotees of this.

In veterinary medicine the Flathead tribe used sharpened wooden sticks to help drain off horses' swollen ankles.

Returning to human beings some of the Cree tribe used a root decoction to ease toothache.

Far fewer North American Indian tribes seem to have found medicinal uses for this shrub. From records it would seem that interest in this aspect was evident particularly in the Blackfoot tribe and some of the Cree Indians. The former used the plant or more specifically the fruit for treating ear and eye problems, nursing mothers and stomach disorders, and they also used the plant as an ingredient in a purgative. The latter turned to twigs and the root for inclusion in remedies for coughs, colds, lung disorders and fever. Both the Thompson tribe and the Okanagan-Colville used the shrub as an ingredient in contraceptive potions, and the Pomo Indians used a root decoction for some period problems. Crushed fruit were employed by the Cheyenne to encourage poorly children to eat.

Locally the fruit are eaten raw, cooked (pies, preserves and jams) and can also be frozen or dried like raisins (*Vitis vinifera*). They are made into sauces, syrups, wines and liqueurs too and used as a flavouring in baked food. The dried leaves have provided a substitute tea.

At the turn of the 20th and 21st Centuries cultivated varieties of northwestern juneberry are beginning to be developed commercially and orchards can be found in central Canada where research into new strains is also taking place.

The plant as food is not only enjoyed by human beings. Among the records some note that moose, elk, deer, sheep, goats, rabbits and rodents feed off the stems and leaves but grouse, waxwings, thrushes, and pheasant, and chipmunks, coyotes, and bears seem to prefer the berries. It also attracts various kinds of butterflies.

Young pliable stems have been used in basketmaking.