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Betula alleghaniensis

[Synonyms : *Betula alleghaniensis* var. *fallax*, *Betula alleghaniensis* var. *macrolepis*, *Betula excelsa*, *Betula lutea*, *Betula lutea* var. *macrolepis*]

YELLOW BIRCH is a deciduous tree. Native to north-eastern North America it has slender hanging catkins and leaves that turn yellow in Autumn.

It is also known as Black birch, *Bouleau jaune* (French), *Bříza žlutá* (Czech), Canadian silky wood, Curly birch, *Gelb-Birke* (German), Gold birch, Gray birch, Grey birch, *Gulbjörk* (Swedish), Hard birch, *Keltakoivu* (Finnish), *Merisier* (French), Quebec birch, Red birch, Silver birch, Swamp birch, Tall birch, White birch, Witch hazel, and Yellow betula.

A distillation of young twigs and inner bark yields Oil of wintergreen – but the process is uneconomical compared with that for the synthetic oil.

Alleghaniensis means ‘of or from the Allegheny mountains in eastern North America’.

An inner bark decoction was used by some of the North American Chippewa Indians to treat fluid retention.

Some authorities note that ground inner bark has provided flour for emergency rations (and in late Spring the sap can be tapped for syrup). The twigs have been boiled to make a tea substitute.

Yellow birch has such flammable, papery bark that it can still be used successfully to start a camp fire when it is wet.

The strong and durable, light brown wood has been used for manufacturing plywood, and for veneering, cooperage and fuel. It has also been harvested to make a wide range of items from railway sleepers, flooring, wheels, furniture and musical instruments to packing cases, shuttles, button moulds and toys.

The tree provides food for deer, beavers and rabbits, as well as birds such as grouse.

For Quebec province in Canada yellow birch has become a provincial emblem.

Medicinally, local herbalists have used essential oil to ease rheumatism as well as painful muscles and joints.