

Carya alba

[Synonyms : *Carya alba* var. *anomala*, *Carya alba* var. *ficoides*, *Carya alba* var. *ovoidea*, *Carya alba* var. *subcoriacea*, *Carya alba* subsp. *tomentosa*, *Carya compressa*, *Carya squamosa*, *Carya tomentosa*, *Carya tomentosa* forma *ficoides*, *Carya tomentosa* var. *integrifolia*, *Carya tomentosa* var. *maxima*, *Carya tomentosa* forma *ovoidea*, *Carya tomentosa* var. *subcoriacea*, *Hicoria alba*, *Hicoria borealis*, *Hicoria ovata*, *Hicoria tomentosa*, *Hicorius alba*, *Juglans alba*, *Juglans compnosa*, *Juglans ovata*, *Juglans squamosa*, *Juglans tomentosa*]

MOCKERNUT is a deciduous tree. Native to eastern North America, it has dull yellow catkins and leaflets that turn brilliant gold in Autumn.

It is also known as Bigbud, Bigbud hickory, Big hickory, Black hickory, Bullnut, Common hickory, Hardbark hickory, *Hickorynoot* (Dutch), Hickory-nut, Hognut, Mochel nut, Mockernut hickory, Red hickory, Shagbark hickory, Shagbark tree, Shagbark walnut, True hickory, Walnut, White-bear hickory, White-heart hickory, and White hickory.

The leaflets are extremely aromatic when crushed or bruised. The flowers are pollinated by wind.

Alba means ‘white’ with reference to the lightly coloured sap wood.

Apparently the common name Mockernut comes from a Dutch word for hammer *mokker* as without such a tool the nut’s very thick shell would be extremely difficult to break.

(Bearing this in mind one has to admire for instance the powerful jaws or the ingenuity of squirrels and other small creatures which are said to enjoy these nuts and manage to find a way into them.)

Records suggest that both the Cherokee and Choctaw North American Indian tribes harvested mockernut for food.

The Choctaw tribe seem to have recognized insecticidal qualities in the leaves as authorities have noted that they scattered them as an insect repellent (not least against fleas).

The inner bark was woven into baskets and chair seats by the Cherokee, and they used the wood not only as a fuel but also for making blowgun darts and arrow shafts, tool handles, barrel hoops and cooking tools.

In a medicinal capacity the Cherokees used mockernut to treat colds, poliomyelitis pain and some female problems. They prescribed a bark infusion for encouraging supple limbs, chewed the inner bark to treat oral soreness, and also dressed cuts with the bark.

The very sweet-tasting nuts can be found in local markets – and they are also sold commercially notwithstanding the fact that they have very thick shells and the kernels are relatively small. In Spring the sweet-tasting sap can be tapped and is said to provide a pleasant drink.

Authorities indicate that of all the hickories it is nuts from this one for which much wildlife opts. Apart from the squirrels referred to earlier, it is known that the nuts (and on occasion the bark) are eaten by bears, foxes, rabbits, beavers and mice, as well as some deer which also browse on the leaves and twigs. To a lesser extent it is recorded that birds such as turkeys, ducks and quail will eat the nuts too.

Boiled in diluted vinegar, the bark yields a black dye and a yellow one if it is combined with alum. Leaves, twigs and cream of tartar are said to produce a light brown-coloured dye.

The hard tough wood has been used for making wagons and carriages, agricultural implements, handles for axes and other tools, machinery parts, sports equipment and baskets. It has also been burnt as fuel.

Today the wood (prized by many beyond that of all other hickories) still provides material for pulp, charcoal and fuel, as well as material for veneering (although suitable logs for this are said to be in short supply), poles, ladder rungs, agricultural equipment, tool handles and sports equipment for gymnasia and athletics. Like other hickories the wood (usually in the form of chips and sawdust mixed with a lesser amount of solid wood) is valued for smoking meats too.

Medicinally, local herbalists have used the inner bark internally to treat tuberculosis and diarrhoea and externally it has been applied to ulcers and sore eyes. It has also been chewed (like that of the sand hickory, *Carya pallida*) to ease oral sores.