

*Carya cordiformis*

[Synonyms : *Carya amara*, *Carya cordiformis* var. *latifolia*, *Carya minima*, *Hicoria cordiformis*, *Hicoria minima*, *Juglans ailantifolia* var. *cordiformis*, *Juglans alba* var. *minima*, *Juglans coarctata*, *Juglans cordiformis*, *Juglans lavalleyi*, *Juglans sieboldiana* var. *cordiformis*, *Juglans subcordiformis*]

**BITTERNUT** is a deciduous tree. Native to eastern North America it has yellowish-green catkins and leaflets that turn bright gold in Autumn.

It is also known as Bitter hickory, *Bittern othickory* (Swedish), Bitternut hickory, Bitter pecan tree, Bitter pignut, Butternut, Butternut hickory, Highland hickory, *Karvashikkori* (Finnish), *Nogal morado* (Spanish), *Ořechovec hořký* (Czech), Pig hickory, Pig-nut, Pig-nut hickory, Pig walnut, Redheart hickory, Swamp hickory, Sweet pecan, White hickory, and Yellowbud hickory.

The yellowish-green fruit split open along the ridges to reveal thick-shelled, greyish-brown nuts that have acquired a name for being bitter. In actual fact they are variable and some are more bitter than others.

The flowers are pollinated by the wind.

*Cordiformis* is derived from Latin *cordis* (heart) and *-formis* (shape) components meaning ‘heart-shaped’.

Especially familiar to the North American Iroquois Indians the nuts were a staple food added to puddings, soups, sauces and bread – and when crushed and boiled they were even made into a drink.

The Iroquois mixed the nut’s oil with bear grease as a mosquito repellent (and also used it in their hair) and used the bark to make seats. Bitternut was used by the Omaha tribe for making their snowshoes.

It seems that the Meskwaki tribe found medicinal use for bitternut as they prescribed a bark infusion as a laxative and a remedy for fluid retention.

Some authorities have noted that early European settlers extracted the oil from the nuts for burning as lamp oil.

Today the nuts can still be eaten locally.

Although some authorities declare that rodents enjoy eating the nuts others note that they can be avoided by squirrels no less than humans – an indication, no doubt, of their bitterness (however variable).

Apart from being used in the past to make yokes for oxen, the wood (which can be brittle) has also provided material for hoops, sports equipment and tool handles. It is still burnt as fuel today and is considered to produce good quality charcoal but it has been (and still is) especially prized for smoking meat such as hams or bacon. Although today the wood of some of its close relatives is often preferred, the hardness and durability of it continues to recommend it for making tool handles, ladders, interior panelling, furniture, crates and pallets, and flooring.

Bitternut is grown as an ornamental and shade tree and to meet the demand is also cultivated in commercial stands for its wood.

Medicinally, a bark tea has been recommended by local herbalists for easing stomach disorders and for fluid retention in addition to a laxative – and early European settlers are said to have used the seed oil to ease rheumatism.