

Celtis occidentalis

[Synonyms : *Celtis audibertiana*, *Celtis canina* var. *crassifolia*, *Celtis canina* var. *pumila*]

BEAVER WOOD is a deciduous tree. Native to eastern North America it has pale green flowers and leaves that turn yellow in Autumn.

It is also known as American hackberry, American nettle tree, Bastard elm, Bigleaf hackberry, Common hackberry, False elm, *Gube* (Omaha and Ponca North American Indian), Hackberry, Hacktree, Hoop ash, Huck, *Kaapsit* (Pawnee North American Indian), Manny berry, Nettle tree, Northern hackberry, Oneberry, Sugarberry, *Wake-warutsh* (Winnebago North American Indian), Western celtis, Western hackberry, and *Yamnumnugapi* (Dakota North American Indian).

The flowers are pollinated by the wind.

Occidentalis means ‘western (especially North American)’.

Beaver wood was familiar to North American Indian tribes and many of them, such as some of the Keresan, Omaha, Pawnee, and Meskwaki ate the small, sweet-tasting dark purple berries. The Dakota tribe used them to flavour meat dishes.

In the Great Lakes area, in the north-eastern part of the North American Continent, records indicate that the Indian tribes there, not least the Meskwaki, fed inner bark to their ponies as a coat conditioner.

The Kiowa tribe used beaver wood for altar fuel during the rituals of the peyote ceremony (referred to under mescal buttons, *Lophophora williamsii*).

As a medicine beaver wood played a role in the range of treatments used by the Houma and Iroquois tribes. The former adopted it for easing sore throats and venereal disease, while the Iroquois chose it for treating various female problems.

European settlers in North America used the roots for dyeing linen. They made agricultural implements and cheap furniture from the heavy, light yellow wood. They also used this wood for fencing and fuel.

Today some American botanists will point out that the tiny ripe berries make an ideal snack in the wild but their size and their hard seeds do not lend themselves to culinary activities.