

Cephalanthus occidentalis

[Synonyms : *Cephalanthus berlandieri*, *Cephalanthus occidentalis* var. *californicus*,
Cephalanthus occidentalis var. *pubescens*]

BUTTON BUSH is a deciduous, aquatic shrub or tree. Native to eastern North America it has fragrant, creamy-white flowers with pronounced, stamen-like, seed-bearing organs.

It is also known as Box bush, Bush globeflower, Buttonball shrub, Button tree, Button willow, Buttonwood, Buttonwood shrub, Common buttonbush, Crane willow, Crouper bush, Globe-flower, Honey-bells, *Knopfbaum* (German), Little snowball, Mountain globe-flower, Pin-ball, Pond dogwood, River bush, Swamp dogwood, Swamp globeflower, Swamp wood, Swan dogwood, White ball, Wild licorice, and Wild liquorice.

The shrub has a jasmine-like (*Jasminum*) fragrance and has acquired a reputation for surviving floods. It is attractive to butterflies and bumble-bees.

Warning – the plant is poisonous (particularly the root, bark and leaves). It can cause convulsions, vomiting and paralysis. The grazed plant can be poisonous for some animals, especially horses.

Occidentalis means ‘western (especially North American)’.

The seeds are enjoyed by birds, especially waterfowl.

Button bush wood was used by the Comanche North American Indian tribe for what records refer to as their ‘game sticks’.

The North American Meskwaki Indians used the bark (which contains a lot of tannin) not only medicinally as a laxative and tonic but also infused as a tea for an emetic. The Kiowa tribe prescribed a decoction of the roots to stem haemorrhages. This was also taken for lung disorders, and a tincture of the bark was used to treat venereal diseases. Eye problems were treated with it by the Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes and the former, like the Seminole Indians also used it to ease fever. For the Koasati tribe button bush offered a remedy for rheumatism and the Seminole Indians seem to have used it for various urinary ailments, stomach upsets, period problems and blood disorders. Not least the bark was chewed in the Choctaw tribe to counter toothache.