

*Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*

[Synonyms : *Chamaecyparis nutkaensis*, *Chamaecyparis nutkatensis*, *Cupressus nootkatensis*, *Thuyopsis borealis*]

**NOOTKA CYPRESS** is an evergreen tree. Native to western North America it has tiny, greenish-brown cones.

It is also known as Alaska cedar, Alaska cypress, Alaska ground cypress, Alaska yellow cedar, Nootka false-cypress, Nootka Sound cypress, *Nutkacypress* (Swedish), *Nutkansypressi* (Finnish), Pacific Coast yellow cedar, Sitka cypress, Sitka yellow-cedar cypress, Yellow cedar, and Yellow cypress.

*Nootkatensis* means ‘of or from Nootka Sound in British Columbia, Canada’.

North American Indian tribes in British Columbia such as the Kwakiutl, Hanaksiala, Haisla, Quileute, Nitinaht, Hoh and Kitasoo, and some in Alaska, have used the slightly brittle wood for canoe paddles and, apart from the Kwakiutl, they and the British Columbian Hesquiat and Oweekeno Indians also used this durable wood in the construction of the canoes themselves. Records indicate that the Kitasoo Indians used the hard wood on the one hand for building – and on the other for tool handles. The Oweekeno tribe made tools and canoe bailers out of it and, like the Kwakiutl and Kitasoo, they also used this fragrant, yellow wood for storage containers. For the Kitasoo, Hanaksiala, Kwakiutl and Haisla tribes the wood provided material for their bows, and while the Nitinaht Indians used it for sacred carvings, it was also fashioned into ceremonial masks or headdresses by the Bella Coola, Oweekeno, Hanaksiala, Haisla and Hesquiat tribes. It was carved into ornamental dishes too by the Hesquiat and Kwakiutl Indians.

The inner bark seems to have been equally useful for many of the British Columbian tribes. It was used in their sacred carvings by the Nitinaht Indians, was woven into baskets by members of the Kitasoo tribe, and both tribes and the Oweekeno also used it for making different grades of cordage. It seems to have been harvested for making mats by the Kitasoo, Kwakiutl and Bella Coola Indians, and they and the Hanaksiala, Oweekeno, Haisla, Nitinaht and Hesquiat tribes all wove it into blankets. Records also note that inner bark was made into various types of clothing. It was used by the Haisla and Hesquiat tribes in the wardrobes of their chiefs, and it was also used by them generally (and by the Bella Coola, Hanaksiala, Oweekeno, Nitinaht, Kwakiutl and Kitasoo) to make such things as capes and loincloths. The Kitasoo and Nitinaht tribes wove hats out of it too.

Records suggest that Nootka cypress was especially respected for its medicinal properties by the Kwakiutl tribe. They not only used it externally in poultices for treating sores and as an ingredient in sweat baths taken by members of the tribe suffering from rheumatism or arthritis, but also prescribed it internally in infusion as a kind of panacea.

It is believed that the first European to identify the Nootka cypress in its natural habitat was Archibald Menzies (1754-1842). He was the Scottish naval surgeon and botanist, who accompanied George Vancouver (1757-1798), the English navigator, between 1790 and 1795 when he was carrying out survey work in Australia and New Zealand and then charting some of the western North American coastline.

Apart from aforementioned uses the wood has also been of commercial value. It has been used for piling, flooring, battery separators, water and chemical tanks, utility (electricity,

telephone etc.) poles, musical instruments, toys and window boxes. This diversity of use highlights the wood's high degree of durability. Today it can be used for making furniture and for interior finishing (buildings), as well as boat and shipbuilding.