

*Comptonia peregrina*

[Synonyms : *Comptonia asplenifolia*, *Comptonia ceterach*, *Comptonia peregrina* var. *asplenifolia*, *Comptonia peregrina* var. *tomentosa*, *Liquidambar peregrina*, *Myrica asplenifolia*, *Myrica aspleniifolia* var. *tomentosa*, *Myrica comptonia*, *Myrica peregrina*]

**SWEET FERN** is a deciduous shrub. Native to eastern North America it has greenish-brown catkins.

It is also known as Canadian sweetgale, Fern bush, Fern gale, Ferngate, Fern-leaved gale, Meadow fern, Shrubby fern, Shrubby sweet fern, Spleenwort bush, Spleenwort fern, Sweet bush, Sweet ferry, and Wild tea.

*Peregrina* is derived from Latin *peregrinus* (foreign, strange) meaning ‘foreign, exotic or immigrant’.

Women in the Menominee North American Indian tribe used sweet fern as a food flavouring. The Chippewa made a tea from the leaves.

The dried leaves were burnt by the Potawatomi Indians as an insect repellent.

Sweet fern was also enjoyed by the Chippewa tribe as a scent – the leaves were not only used as a skin perfume but they were also added to the water sprinkled on the hot stones in a steam bath, and provided incense during ceremonial rituals.

Allegedly it also served in a more sinister role as the Menominee women were said to use a sweet fern leaf with that of another plant in lethal medicine they administered to detested sick patients. They also prescribed it during childbirth. The leaves, soaked in water, were used by quite a few North American Indian tribes, including the Penobscot, Micmac, Delaware and Mohican, to treat the severe irritation caused by poison ivy, and the Potawatomi and Shinnecock tribes are recorded as having used it also to treat itching skin. In addition Delaware Indians turned to it for remedies for tuberculosis, some blood disorders and urinary ailments, and they and the Malecite tribe used sweet fern for treating various lung problems. It provided a source of medicine for the Chippewa Indians for curing stomach cramps and easing fever. The Cherokee used it for worms, and both the Micmac and Algonkin Indians included it in remedies for headaches.

It is said that during the American Civil War in the 1860s the dried leaves were used to make a tea.

Medicinally, herbalists have recommended sweet fern for treating diarrhoea, wind and rheumatism. It has also been used in remedies for some lung disorders and has been applied externally to ease bruising.