

Cornus alternifolia

[Synonyms : *Swida alternifolia*]

ALTERNATE-LEAVED CORNELL is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to north-eastern North America it has creamy-white flowers leaves that turn reddish-purple in Autumn. It is also known as Alternateleaf dogwood, Blue dogwood, Blue-fruited dogwood, Dogwood, Green osier, Pagoda, Pagoda cornel, Pagoda dogwood, Pigeonberry, Purple dogwood, and Umbrella tree.

Alternifolia is derived from Latin *alterni-* (exchange) and *-folia* (leaved) components meaning ‘alternate leaves (on each side of the stem not opposite each other)’.

Authorities point out that the bark is so thin that it increases the vulnerability of these trees in the wild to forest fires.

The fact that the wood does not split easily meant that it was suitable for the war clubs that some of the Chippewa North American Indians fashioned out of it. They also used it for making tool handles, while the Cherokee tribe made it into loom shuttles. The Cherokee carved the wood and the Chippewa tribe used twigs for thatching.

Muskrat hunters in the Chippewa tribe washed their traps in a solution of boiled root as a charm to lure their prey into the snare.

Alternate-leaved cornel was an ingredient in smoking mixtures prepared by both the Menominee and some of the Chippewa.

Among some North American Indian tribes various parts of the plant were used medicinally.

The Cherokee Indians used it to treat fever, blood disorders, headaches, measles, wind and worms in children. They also prescribed an inner bark infusion for loss of voice, and they and the Menominee used it as a remedy for diarrhoea. The latter employed it for treating piles, and authorities note that there appears to be at least one recorded instance when they also included it in treatment for cancer. Various female problems (primarily connected with pregnancy) were treated with it by both the Iroquois and Cherokee tribes, and the former also considered it a remedy for some venereal diseases, colds and tuberculosis. It was employed in remedies for coughs by both the Chippewa and Iroquois Indians – and some of the former also used it when it was necessary to cause vomiting.

Apart from the foregoing, records indicate that the Potawatomi, Iroquois and Chippewa tribes all turned to alternate-leaved cornel as a source of medicine for some eye ailments.

The heavy wood is used for turning.

With the help of vinegar a variable brown dye can be obtained from the roots.

In the wild many animals and birds relish various parts of this plant including black bear, deer, rabbits, beavers and grouse – and it also provides cover for them. Birds are especially partial to the blue-black (rarely yellow) fruit and authorities often seem to point out that when the tree has been stripped by them in late Summer the remaining red stalks provide it with attractive colour.