

*Elaeagnus commutata*

[Synonyms : *Elaeagnus argentea*]

**SILVERBERRY** is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to North America (particularly Canada) it has small and sweetly fragrant, silvery flowers that are pale yellow-inside.

It is also known as *Aito kilsepensas* (Finnish), American silverberry, *Bredbladig silverbuske* (Swedish), *Hlošina stříbrná* (Czech), Russian olive, *Silverbuske* (Swedish), *Vanlig silverbuske* (Swedish), Wolfberry, and Wolf willow.

The flowers are pollinated by bees – and in colder climates the seeds tend to be dispersed by the wind as the fruit roll on packed snow.

*Commutata* means ‘changeable’.

Authorities have noted that in Alaska the small and mealy, silvery-coloured berries have been eaten fried in moose fat and that the fruit were even a staple part of the diet of some North American Indian tribes. The berries were eaten by the Okanagan-Colville, Cree, some of the Tanana Indians, the Paiute, Blackfoot and Montana Indian tribes. While it is described how the Tanana and Blackfoot Indians used the fruit to make soup and the Blackfoot also made them into a kind of sweet, it is also mentioned that the berries were used by the Cree to make wine.

The bark was fashioned into cooking tools by both the Thompson and Okanagan-Colville North American Indian tribes. In addition the latter also used it to make blankets, clothing, sacking for containers and rope, while the Thompson Indians made it into twine that in turn was used for matting, bags and clothing. According to records the Cree made it into cord, and the Blackfoot used it to prepare strong rope. On a much lighter note strips of bark were also used by Blackfoot children in Winter to spin their stone tops as they whipped them across the ice.

With the seeds (or in the case of the Arapaho Indians the berries) several of the tribes such as the Cree, Thompson, Blackfoot and some of the Tanana made jewellery, and the Blackfoot tribe are said to have used the berries for soap.

Silverberry was a source of medicine for some North American tribes. The Blackfoot applied the bark externally for frostbite, while the Thompson Indians prescribed a root decoction as an ingredient in an extremely poisonous remedy taken to cure some types of venereal disease.

Authorities believe that the berries are probably too dry and mealy to offer a viable commercial fruit – but they are still harvested locally. The fruit can be eaten raw (when completely ripe) or cooked and are said to taste especially good in preserves and soup. The seed is also edible raw or cooked and can also be eaten as part of the fruit.

The fruit are enjoyed by song birds.

This shrub can be cultivated as hedging.

Silverberry was probably introduced to England in 1813.