

Fagus grandifolia

[Synonyms : *Fagus americana*, *Fagus atropunicea*, *Fagus ferruginea*, *Fagus grandifolia* subsp. *caroliniana*, *Fagus grandifolia* subsp. *heterophylla*, *Fagus latifolia*]

AMERICAN BEECH is a deciduous tree. Native to eastern North America it has green flowers and leaves that turn yellow and gold in Autumn.

It is also known as Beech, *Buk velkolistý* (Czech), Carolina beech, Gray beech, Red beech, Ridge beech, Stone beech, White beech, and Winter beech.

Grandifolia is made up of Latin *grandis* (large) and *-folia* (leaved) components.

Local North American Indian tribes, such as the Menominee and some of the Chippewa, collected and stored the nuts for Winter food. For the Iroquois Indians they were a staple food and, apart from making them into special delicacies and sauces as well as adding them to potato dishes, bread and puddings, they also used them to make a drink. Records of the Chippewa and Potawatomi tribes give examples of how some of the tribes avoided the laborious harvesting of the nuts – and their subsequent shelling. The former relied on chipmunks – these small creatures are not only noted for storing only those nuts that are in good condition but also the nuts are all shelled. Similarly apparently the Potawatomi sought out deer-mouse caches and, although no indication seems to be available as to the quality of the hoard, again all the nuts were ready shelled. Authorities have noted that the Algonkin Indians also included the nuts in their diet – but it was generally the men who ate them when they were out hunting.

The Iroquois Indians found a completely different use for the nuts. Oil from them was mixed with bear grease and this mixture provided a mosquito repellent. Fibre offered the Micmac tribe material for the frames of their snowshoes, and the wood was used by the Cherokee not only for lumber but also for making wooden buttons. The Potawatomi Indians used the wood to make food bowls.

Some North American Indian tribes such as the Menominee used the inner bark as an ingredient in various medicinal mixtures. Burns were treated with it by both the Iroquois and Potawatomi tribes, and the former also used parts of American beech for in remedies for liver disorders, blood problems and, if the mother-to-be was suffering, abortion. The Potawatomi also used it for treating frostbite and the Malecite Indians applied it to sores. It was a remedy for some lung complaints in the Chippewa tribe. The Rappahannock used it in treatments for poison ivy (*Rhus radicans*), Micmac Indians turned to it in treatments for venereal diseases, and the Cherokee viewed it as a remedy for worms.

In North America in 1904 American beech was struck by a fungus disease known as chestnut blight and a large number of the trees were lost.

The bark has been used for tanning.

The wood, which shrinks when it is drying and decays relatively readily, is used for making furniture, and tool handles. It has also been used for veneering, turning and general millwork, as well as for making railroad ties, flooring, and building interiors, brooms and brushes and barrels, crates, baskets and boxes. American beechwood has also provided charcoal, pulpwood and extracts of various substances including creosote or wood tar, acetates and methanol.

Today American beech has similar uses to those of the beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). The tar is used by the pharmaceutical industry in medicinal soaps and skin creams, and the wood is used for flooring and turning, particularly for making furniture and kitchen utensils. Medicinally, herbalists have used it in the treatment of diabetes, ulcers, wind and skin disorders. In folk medicine bark (or leaves) has been applied to ease frostbite and burns.