

Ginkgo biloba

[Synonyms : *Pterophyllus salisburyensis*, *Saliburya biloba*, *Salisburia adiantifolia*, *Salisburia biloba*]

GINKGO (Dutch, English, German) is a deciduous tree. Found in China it has either yellow catkins (male trees) or tiny pale yellow turning to orange flowers (female trees). Both have maidenhair fern-like green leaves that turn pale green yellow or gold in Autumn. It is also known as *Árbol de las pagodas* (Spanish), *Árbol de los cuarenta escudos* (Spanish), *Árbol de los escudos* (Spanish), *Árbol de oro* (Spanish), *Arbre aux mille écus* (French), *Arbre aux quarante écus* (French), *Arbre fossile* (French), *Arbre sacré des temples d'Asie* (French), *Bách quả* (Vietnamese), *Bai guo* (Chinese), *Balkuwari* (Hindi), *Cây bách quả* (Vietnamese), *Chinesischer Tempelbaum* (German), Common ginkgo, Duck's foot tree, *Elefantenoherbaum* (German), *Eun-haeng-na-mu* (Korean), *Fächerbaum* (German), *Fächerblattbaum* (German), *Fossil ağaci* (Turkish), Fossil tree, *Frauenhaarbaum* (German), *Gigko* (Greek), Ginkgo (English, Greek), *Gingo* (Spanish), *Ginkgo ağacınin* (Turkish), *Ginkgo-Baum* (German), *Ginkgo dvojlaločné* (Slovak), Ginkgo nut, Ginkgo, Ginkgo tree, *Ginko* (Italian), Ginkyo, *Gin kyo* (Japanese), *Gkingko* (Greek), *Goethebaum* (German), *Goldfruchtbaum* (German), *Grosservater-Enkel-Bbaum* (German), *Haeng-jamok* (Korean), *Ichō* (Japanese), *Ichou* (Japanese), *Japanischer Nussbaum* (German), *Japanischer Tempelbaum* (German), *Japane notenboom* (Dutch), *Japon eriği* (Turkish), *Japon eriği olarak bilinir* (Turkish), *Jinan dvojlaločný* (Czech), *Mabad ag* (Arabic), *Mabet ağaci* (Turkish), *Mädchenhaarbaum* (German), Maidenhair tree, *Milorzqb chiński* (Polish), *Milorzqb dwudzielny* (Polish), *Milorzqb dwuklapowy* (Polish), *Milorzqb japoński* (Polish), *Musteristré* (Icelandic), *Musterisviður* (Icelandic), *Neidonhiuspuu* (Finnish), *Nogueira-do-Japão* (Portuguese), *Noix de ginkgo* (French), *Noyer du Japon* (French), *Páfrányfenyő* (Hungarian), *Pai go* (Chinese), *Silberaprikose* (German), *Silberpflaume* (German), *Tempelbaum* (German), *Tempelboom* (Dutch), *Tempelträäd* (Swedish), *Tempeltræ* (Danish), *Temppelipuu* (Finnish), *Vrekboom* (Afrikaans), *Waaierboom* (Dutch), *Weisse Frucht* (German), and *Yin-hing* (Chinese).

Apparently no other known tree today has similar shaped and veined leaves.

Oil can be extracted from the yellow seeds.

Warning – overdoses of the fruit pulp can cause diarrhoea, vomiting, restlessness and irritability. It can cause serious dermatitis.

Biloba is derived from Latin *lobi-* (lobe) component meaning ‘with two lobes’.

The tree, which was growing on the planet at least 200 million years ago, has changed little in that time and is sometimes referred to as a ‘living fossil’. Then it could be found in what would have been steamy swamps on the landmasses of the areas known today as America, Asia, Australia and Europe as witnessed in unearthed fossils. Petrified stumps of ginkgo trees from the Miocene age (estimated to be about 15 million years old) can be seen today in the Ginkgo Forest State Park in the Cascade Range of mountains south-east of Seattle in the north-western United States. Western scientists recognized it as the forerunner of conifers and until the 18th Century believed the ginkgo to be extinct. Some believe it has been saved from extinction because of its cultivation, particularly in eastern China and in Japan where it is grown as a street tree and around Buddhist temples. The

first known records of ginkgo are believed to have been found in 8th Century Chinese literature.

In 1690 Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1728) came across ginkgo when on a diplomatic mission to Japan and wrote of it on his return to Europe. Utrecht (in the Netherlands) acquired the first plant in 1730 and this is believed still to be alive in Kew Gardens in England (it was bought from an east London nurseryman in 1754). The same year that it is said to have been found in east London ginkgo was also introduced to North America.

The tree has been celebrated in European literature. It appears in the collected lyrics entitled *West-östlicher Divan* which were published in 1819 and written by the acclaimed German poet, dramatist, scientist and court official, Goethe (1749-1832). Apparently such a tree grew in front of his house in Jena, south-west of Leipzig.

It bears plum-like, dreadful-smelling (similar to rancid butter) yellow seeds on the female specimens and these are understood to make a horrid mess when they fall. Today when it is planted as a street tree, certainly in the West, town planners are careful not to plant those that will bear seeds.

The wood can provide both timber and fuel.

In southern and central China especially the roasted seeds known as *Pa-kwo* are eaten as a delicacy and can be included in bird's-nest soup. The flesh is also eaten between the courses of a meal, either preserved or baked, as a digestive aid.

In China the leaves and fruit are used in regulating aphids and grubs.

Medicinally, its properties are exploited in China. It has been used to treat asthma and piles, and to improve blood circulation. Recent studies suggest that it can help to improve impaired mental performance caused by Alzheimer's disease in elderly patients. These studies indicate no side effects and seem to bring some relief from other debilitating effects of the disease, including hearing loss. Ginkgo would also appear to have possible benefits for circulatory disorders, including diabetes, and some inflammatory conditions, as well as for Parkinson's disease, and asthma. The oil is used today to treat dermatitis.