

Juglans nigra

[Synonyms : *Juglans nigra* forma *nigra*, *Wallia nigra*]

BLACK WALNUT is a deciduous tree. Native to eastern North America, it has greenish catkins.

It is also known as American walnut, American black walnut, *Amerikaanse zwarte walnoot* (Dutch), *Amerikanischer Nussbaum* (German), *Amerikansk sort valnød* (Danish), *Burakkuooru nattsu* (Japanese), Burbank walnut, *Chak* (Winnebago North American Indian), *Cha-sapa* (Teton Sioux North American Indian), *Chernyi orekh* (Russian), Eastern black walnut, Eastern walnut, Gunwood, *Hei he tao* (Chinese), *Hei hu tao* (Chinese), *Hma* (Dakota North American Indian), *Juglando nigra* (Esperanto), *Legno di noce nero d'America* (Italian), *Mustajalopähkinä* (Finnish), *Nogal americano* (Spanish), *Nogal negro* (Spanish), *Nogal negro americano* (Spanish), *Nogueira-preta* (Portuguese), *Noyer noir* (French), *Noyer noir d'Amérique du Nord* (French), *Orech čierny* (Slovak), *Ořešák černý* (Czech), *Sahtaku* (Pawnee North American Indian), *Schwarznuss* (German), *Schwarznussbaum* (German), *Schwarze Walnuss* (German), *Schwarzer Walnussbaum* (German), *Sort valnød* (Danish), *Svart valnöt* (Swedish), *Tdage* (Omaha and Ponca North American Indian), Virginia walnut, *Walnoot* (Dutch), Walnut, and *Zwarte walnoot* (Dutch); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of majesty, strength, and tenacity.

Warning – prolonged contact with stem juice can cause dermatitis.

Nigra means 'black' with reference to the bark.

Familiar to many North American Indian tribes, the Kiowa's name for the black walnut compares the appearance of the walnut to that of an unfaithful wife's nose. In the past Kiowa custom permitted the cuckolded husband to cut a walnut-sized piece of it from her.

For the North American Iroquois Indians black walnut was highly respected as its bark played a role in the tribe's rain rituals.

The hard-shelled dark brown fruit (and the tree's sap) contributed to a significant part of the diet of some of the North American Indian tribes, particularly those around the Great Lakes where archaeologists have found remains dating back to about 2000 BC. They were eaten raw, cooked in honey, or added to soup and they were also pickled. The nuts were familiar to among others the Pawnee, Meskwaki, Winnebago, Cherokee, Dakota, Ponca, Omaha, Kiowa and Comanche Indians. They were stored for future or Winter use by the Comanche and Cherokee tribes, and were used to make soup by the Pawnee, Winnebago, Dakota, Iroquois, Ponca and Omaha Indians. While for the Iroquois they were a staple food and were an ingredient in bread, sauces, puddings and delicacies, and for the Cherokee the nuts were an ingredient in a kind of porridge. The Iroquois also used the nuts to make a beverage.

The shells (which can produce a yellowish-brown dye) have been used for dyeing and tanning. A brown dye was also obtained from the bark by the Chippewa Indians, and records indicate too that the Cherokee used the bark, roots and husks. The Dakota tribe used the roots for a black dye – while the Chippewa preferred the bark, the Meskwaki liked using the wood and bark, and the Pawnee, Omaha, Ponca and Winnebago tribes chose the nuts

for this. Leaves provided the Cherokee with a green dye. The roots provided a bluish-black dye if they were boiled and this was certainly used by the Kiowa for tanning buffalo hide.

Nut oil (mixed with bear grease) was used by the North American Iroquois tribe as a hair dressing.

The Iroquois used it too as a mosquito repellent, while the Delaware Indians scattered leaves in their homes to repel fleas.

The Cherokee Indians chose the heavy wood not only for carving but also for making furniture and gunstocks.

Black walnut was a source of medicine for several North American Indian tribes. Some tribes such as the Kiowa took a decoction of the root bark to treat worms while others, including the Delaware and Comanche Indians, applied pulverized leaves externally for dealing with ringworm. The tree also provided an external remedy for itching skin for the Houma tribe while the Delaware Indians used it to ease inflammation – and the Cherokee chose it for easing sores. The Meskwaki, some of the Delaware, and the Iroquois tribes used black walnut as a purgative or laxative, and some of the Delaware also used it when it was necessary to cause vomiting. It offered a Cherokee treatment for smallpox, and a Houma remedy for blood pressure. The Iroquois chose it for treating headaches and blood disorders, and the Rappahannock employed it for chills and dysentery. Cherokee Indians turned to it to ease toothache, and the Meskwaki viewed it as a general remedy for snake bites.

The hard, strong wood was being exported to Britain as early as the 17th Century – and the tree itself was introduced there during the same period.

Many have believed that this North American tree attracts lightning and records certainly show that cattle sheltering beneath its boughs have been struck. Often for this reason it was not felled for shipbuilding in its native land.

For many black walnut is viewed as the national tree for the United States.

The black walnut was believed to have an adverse effect on the fruiting of the apple tree *Malus* and when the principle of companion planting prevails (there has been recent renewed interest in it) the two are kept apart.

The 20th Century World Wars led to a serious depletion in the number of trees because of the demands made on its durable wood. During the 1st World War black walnut was favoured for aeroplane propellers because of the wood's resilience to vibration, and during the 2nd World War the quantities used for gunstocks alone were even greater. It has also been chosen for veneering, interior finishing and furniture.

Today the fruit provide a commercial ingredient used by the food industry in confectionery and ice cream. It is understood that the taste of these nuts is far stronger than that of the European walnut *Juglans regia* and is likely to be used relatively sparingly. The dark brown wood is used for shipbuilding, building interiors, cabinetwork, and veneering, as well as for gunstocks.

Medicinally, the fruit skin has been used to treat worms, ulcers and syphilis, while the juice has been included in remedies for diphtheria.