

Juglans nigra

[Synonyms : *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, *Amerikanischer Nussbaum* (German), Burbank walnut, *Chak* (Winnebago North American Indian), *Cha-sapa* (Teton Sioux North American Indian), Eastern black walnut, Eastern walnut, Gunwood, *Hma* (Dakota North American Indian), *Juglando nigra* (Esperanto), *Ořešák černý* (Czech), *Sahtaku* (Pawnee North American Indian), *Schwarznuß* (German), *Tdage* (Omaha and Ponca North American Indian), Virginia walnut, *Walnoot* (Dutch), and Walnut; 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, 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 that the Cherokee used the bark, roots and husks. The roots provided a bluish-black dye if they were boiled and this was used by the Kiowa as a buffalo hide dye. The Dakota tribe also 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. (The bark has also been used for tanning.) Leaves provided the Cherokee with a green dye.

Nut oil (mixed with bear grease) was used by the North American Iroquois tribe as a hair dressing. They also used it as a mosquito repellent, while the Delaware Indians scattered leaves in their homes to repel fleas.

The Cherokee Indians used 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 to ringworm. The tree also provided an external remedy for itching skin for the Houma tribe and also for inflammation for the Delaware Indians – and was used by the Cherokee 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 used it to treat headaches and blood disorders, while the Rappahannock employed it for chills and dysentery. The Cherokee 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 in 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 used 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.