

*Juniperus californica*

[Synonyms : *Juniperus californica* var. *siskiyouensis*, *Juniperus cedrosiana*, *Juniperus cerrosianus*, *Juniperus pyriformis*, *Sabina californica*]

**CALIFORNIA JUNIPER** is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native to California (south-western North America) it has small berry-like red-brown cones.

It is also known as Californian juniper, California white cedar, Desert white cedar, and Sweetberry cedar.

*Californica* means ‘of or from California (United States)’.

The durable wood was used by the North American Kawaiisu Indians for making their bows and also for cooking tools such as stirrers and ladles. They covered their homes with the ridged greyish-brown bark.

Several North American Indian tribes ate the berries raw including the Costanoan, Kawaiisu, Cahuilla and Diegueño Indians – and the Mendocino Indian tribe ate them dried and boiled. Both the Cahuilla and Kawaiisu Indians dried the cones for future use – and it should perhaps be mentioned that records suggest the Diegueño tended to eat them most when other food was in short supply. It has been mooted by authorities that the berry-like receptacles were really a staple food for the Kawaiisu – and that the Cahuilla also valued them as a bread flour when ground and dried.

As a source of medicine California juniper was familiar to several North American Indian tribes. It was a remedy for hangovers and blood pressure among the Diegueño tribe, while the Gosiute and some of the Apache considered it a cure for coughs and colds. The Mahuna Indians used it to treat influenza and fever, and the Costanoan turned to it when it was necessary to cause sweating or something was needed to deaden pain. It offered a remedy for convulsions and some female problems for some of the Apache as well.

The wood has been used for fencing and fuel. It has almost acquired legendary status for durability in some local areas where it is claimed that

A juniper will outlast two post holes.

Like other junipers this one is often chosen as a Christmas tree. It is interesting to note that the rotation period for stands destined for Christmas trees is 20 to 50 years whereas those earmarked for their wood can be anything from 100 to 300 years – which gives a clear illustration of the tree’s excruciatingly slow growth rate to its natural height.

Young California juniper when within reach is fed on by deer (as well as birds) for which it is a staple whereas sheep and goats view this as emergency rations.