

Juniperus scopulorum

[Synonyms : *Juniperus dealbata*, *Juniperus occidentalis* var. *pleiosperma*, *Juniperus scopulorum* var. *columnaris*, *Juniperus scopulorum* var. *patens*, *Juniperus virginiana* var. *montana*, *Juniperus virginiana* var. *scopulorum*, *Sabina scopulorum*]

ROCKY MOUNTAIN JUNIPER is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native to western North America (the Rocky Mountains) it has small berry-like, whitish-bloomed, bright blue-black cones.

It is also known as Colorado red cedar, Mountain red cedar, Red cedar, Rocky mountain red cedar, Weeping juniper, and Western juniper.

Flowers are pollinated by the wind.

Scopulorum is derived from Latin *scopuli* (cliff, rock) meaning ‘growing on cliffs, crags and projecting rocks’.

The berry-like cones were eaten fresh or cooked by some of the North American Apache tribe and the Keresan and Tewa Indians. The Okanagan-Colville used the cones to make a tea. Rocky mountain juniper wood was popular for many purposes. While the tree itself was held to be a good luck charm by the Thompson tribe, the Cheyenne used this wood for their love flutes (the Kiowa used red cedar, *Juniperus virginiana*). When these were played by an infatuated lover they would lure the girl who was the object of his attentions. The Thompson Indians also used the wood for drum frames – and for their bows, as did the Okanagan-Colville, Cheyenne, Shuswap and Montana Indian tribes. The latter made their fishing lances out of it and the Okanagan-Colville used the wood for their horses’ yokes (and for the spokes of the wheel that was central to their throwing game).

This juniper played a role in the ceremonial rituals of quite a few tribes. For some of the Navajo it was the basis of a medicine taken as a protection against witches and other more tangible enemies – and the whole tribe took the plant before participating in their War Dance. Both the Hoh and Quileute Indians used twigs and cones during rituals – and the Montana Indian tribe burnt the twigs for incense. The plant assumed a significant place in the Sun Dance for the Blackfoot tribe, and Flathead Indians purified the air with the smoke from the burning plant. For the Cheyenne the leaves provided incense that was a particularly important protection against thunder. Okanagan-Colville Indians on the other hand fumigated homes associated with death by burning boughs as a protection against evil spirits.

While the Shuswap Indians considered the plant to be a domestic insect repellent (in their homes it kept bedbugs and earwigs at bay), the Thompson tribe used a cone decoction as an insecticide to get rid of ticks on their horses.

Navajo Indians used the plant as a dry shampoo and rubbed it into their hair to counter dandruff.

Any poisonous potential was exploited by the Okanagan-Colville. They pounded and soaked the berry-like cones and the branches in water and steeped their hunting arrowheads in the result – and when they were waging war their bullets also received this dressing.

There were some veterinary applications as records show that both the Flathead and Thompson tribes included it in horse medication.

The plant was a source of medicine among many North American tribes for a wide range of problems. It seems to have been a general answer for colds among the Flathead, Dakota, Nez Perce, Kutenai, Cheyenne, some of the Navajo, the Okanagan-Colville and the Thompson Indian tribes – and all of them except the latter two used it to ease fever. The Cheyenne treated coughs and oral disorders with it as well as prescribing it as a sedative. The Blackfoot used it to ease vomiting, some of the Navajo took it for headaches, and the latter with the Thompson Indians relied upon it for kidney problems. The Thompson tribe also used it as a remedy for heart ailments, fluid retention and insect bites. On the one hand the Crow Indians took it to enhance appetite and on the other they used it to ease diarrhoea. They, some of the Navajo tribe and also the Thompson Indians turned to it for various stomach upsets – and according to records the Thompson, Crow and Cheyenne tribes all relied upon it during childbirth. The plant was prescribed by the Flathead, Nez Perce, Dakota, Kutenai and Cheyenne Indian tribes for treating pneumonia, and the Stony Indian tribe as well as the Crow and Okanagan-Colville Indians employed it for easing internal bleeding. It was a remedy among Thompson Indians and some of the Okanagan-Colville for various urinary disorders, the Thompson tribe and the Sanpoil used the plant for curing tuberculosis, and the Shuswap and Okanagan-Colville Indians both employed it for treating influenza. While the Dakota tribe relied upon it for cholera, Shoshoni Indians turned to it for venereal diseases, the Swinomish took it as a tonic, and the Montana Indian tribe and the Swinomish, Thompson and Blackfoot Indians all used it for easing rheumatism.

The roasted cones have offered the possibility of making a substitute coffee.

Candles have been made with the fragrant wax that coats the cones.

Settlers have brought branches into their homes as a deodorant, and the scented wood has also been used in this way in addition to being added to firewood.

The soft and durable, aromatic white-streaked red wood has also been made into a range of items from bows and hoops to wheels, as well as being sought after for interior decorating in the home.

In the wild stands the tree provides cover and food for deer and pheasant particularly.