

Juniperus utahensis

[Synonyms : *Juniperus californica* var. *utahensis*, *Juniperus osteosperma*, *Sabina utahensis*]

UTAH JUNIPER is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native to western North America it has tiny sweet-tasting, bloomy reddish-brown berry-like fruit.

Utahensis means ‘of or from Utah (United States)’.

Several North American Indian tribes, such as the Yavapai (for whom it was a staple food) and the Havasupai ground dried cones for flour – and both tribes also used the berry-like cones to make a drink. Some of the Keresan Indians made the cones into a soup, and the Gosiute and Tubatulabal tribes, as well as some of the Apache cooked them before eating them.

The roundish cones have been used in rattles, and long ago they were pierced and strung as necklaces by the Hopi Indians. Juniper was also boiled in water and the solution placed outside for returning gravediggers to wash in. The Hopi were probably not the only tribe to use juniper charcoal as an ingredient for a red body paint, or the bark as tinder. In fact records indicate that both the Yavapai and Havasupai Indians used the bark similarly – and for all three the wood provided fuel. The Yavapai also used a bark torch for lighting.

Wood was used by the Gosiute Indians for construction, as were bark and small logs by the Havasupai. The Navajo tribe made corrals for their animals from the green timber. Gosiute Indians also used the bark for thatching and small branches for flooring. In lighter vein the Havasupai made the pole for their hoop and pole game from this wood.

Utah juniper was also a source of medicine for several North American Indian tribes. Paiute Indians used it for easing fever and stomach upsets. They prescribed it for some period problems, for blood disorders, internal bleeding and pneumonia, and they also applied it to sores and boils. In addition like the Shoshoni they used it to treat coughs, smallpox, influenza, kidney problems, fluid retention and venereal disease, and both tribes took it as a tonic. The Shoshoni, Washo, Havasupai and Paiute Indians used Utah juniper to treat colds, while the Paiute, Washo and Navajo tribes are said to have taken it for headaches. The leaves were closely associated with Hopi rituals surrounding childbirth, and any woman who wanted a female child took a decoction of them. (This same decoction was also administered as a laxative.) Apart from the foregoing the Shoshoni also considered it to be a remedy for measles, heart problems, oral disorders, toothache, worms and burns.