

Juniperus virginiana

[Synonyms : *Juniperus arborescens*, *Sabina virginiana*]

RED CEDAR is an evergreen tree. Native to north-eastern North America it has pea-sized hard, blue berry-like cones.

It is also known as American juniper, American red cedar, *Borievka virgínska* (Slovak), Carolina cedar, Cedar, Cedar apple, Coast juniper, Coast red cedar, Eastern red cedar, Eastern red juniper, Field cedar, *Hante sha* (Dakota North American Indian), *Jalovec virginský* (Czech), Juniper, *Kynäkataja* (Finnish), *Maazi* (Omaha and Ponca North American Indian), Pencil cedar, Pencil juniper, Red juniper, Red savin, *Rotzeder* (German), Sand cedar, Savin, Savin red cedar, Southern juniper, Southern red cedar, Southern red juniper, *Tawatsaako* (Pawnee North American Indian), Tennessee red cedar, Virginia cedar, Virginia juniper, Virginian cedar, Virginian pencil cedar, and *Virginischer Wacholder* (German).

It is a host for apple rust, the pulpy, jelly-like, brown excrescences with long and thin, bright orange tendrils which appear on the trunk and are called ‘cedar apples’.

An oil is obtained from the distilled heartwood and from the wood shavings.

Warning – the extracted oil is poisonous. It can cause burning in the stomach, gastro-intestinal inflammation, convulsions, vomiting, coma and death. Excessive use of the berries can cause kidney disorders.

Virginiana means ‘of or from Virginia (United States)’ which itself was named after the English ‘Virgin Queen’ Elizabeth I (1533-1603).

While the Comanche North American Indians picked the cones for food, the Dakota tribes not only added them to savoury dishes as flavouring but also valued them as thirst quenchers.

Red cedar played an important role in ceremonial rituals of several North American Indian tribes. It was this that provided incense at Kiowa prayer meetings and Dakota funerals – and the tree could also be found near some Chippewa graves. Apart from its participation in the Sun Dance and other rituals performed by the Omaha tribe, they and the Ponca, Dakota, and Pawnee Indians also put red cedar boughs on their teepee poles to ward off lightning because of the tree’s sacred association with the mythical thunderbird. The Navajo tribe also used the wood for the wand used in their War Dance.

Kiowa Indians used red cedar (as the Cheyenne chose creeping juniper, *Juniperus horizontalis*) to make their love flutes. When these were played by an infatuated lover they were supposed to be able to lure the girl who was the object of his attentions. Cherokee Indians used the wood for carving and making furniture, and some of the Chippewa tribe employed this wood for babies’ cradles. It was also fencing material for Cherokees Indians.

Bark fibre was used by Chippewa Indians for matting, and some of the Chippewa covered wigwam and other frames with the bark. Parts of the Chippewa tribe also used the bark to obtain a reddish-brown dye.

Red cedar provided an insect repellent (specifically moths) for the Cherokee Indians, and they used the thick smoke made by the burning wood for smoking animal skins.

Apart from the many uses already referred to some of the Chippewa tribe eventually came to view the red cedar as a cash crop. They traded the wood itself for paper pulp and also made wooden posts that they offered for fencing.

North American Indian tribes, including the Omaha, Pawnee, Ponca and Dakota tribes used the leaves and cones in veterinary medicine in a cough remedy for horses.

Red cedar was also a source of human medicine for many of the North American Indian tribes. It was used by the Dakota, Omaha, Pawnee, Ponca, Cherokee and Iroquois Indians to ease a cold – and apart from the Cherokee they also used it for easing coughs. The Rappahannock prescribed it for asthma and other lung ailments.. Smoke from the burning twigs was recommended by the Pawnees as a sedative to counter nervousness and bad dreams. Both the Cherokee and Omaha Indians used parts of the tree as an agent to cause sweating, and the Cherokee also turned to it as a remedy for measles, worms and some skin problems. Some of the Cree tribe, and the Iroquois are also known to have used the plant as a remedy for fluid retention, and the Oglala claimed to have found a decoction of the leaves to be useful in treating cholera (the Rappahannock used the bark). Red cedar was employed variously by some of the Chippewa for easing headaches, by the Kiowa for some oral disorders, and by the Meskwaki as a stimulant. The latter also valued it for flavouring medicine. Several tribes including the Iroquois, Chippewa, Delaware and Cherokee turned to red cedar for easing rheumatism.

Until the end of the 1st World War red cedar predominated in the world manufacture of wooden pencil casings. Its demand was so great however that by 1918 the wood was extremely scarce. Although it is still used for this purpose today it has been replaced to a large extent by wood from the incense cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*). The wood has also been used for carving and for making small boats, furniture, flooring, mathematical instruments, various household objects and fencing.

Some of the areas in the United States that cherish apple orchards (*Malus*) have destroyed any red cedars within range in order to prevent any outbreaks of apple rust.

In other areas the trees are vigorously cultivated (away from commercial orchards) not only as windbreaks or to control erosion but also as ‘Christmas trees’.

Until the last decade or two the oil (known as Red cedar wood oil) was used in microscopy. Today the wood is still used commercially for making pencils (although as a supporting instead of leading source), and for making insect-proof chests, interior building finishes and wooden-ware. The oil is used as a scent in soap manufacture and as a fixative in perfumery. It is also used in insect sprays, dusting powders and moth repellents.

Medicinally, the cedar apples have been used to treat worms. The oil has been used to obtain abortions, and in remedies for some venereal diseases. An ointment made from the leaves has been used to heal blisters. The plant has also been used for treating various period problems.