

*Larix laricina*

[Synonyms : *Larix alaskensis*, *Larix americana*, *Larix laricina* var. *alaskensis*, *Larix microcarpa*, *Pinus laricina*, *Pinus microcarpa*, *Pinus pendula*]

**TAMARAC** is a short-lived (about 25 years), deciduous tree. Native to eastern North America it has needle-like leaves that turn yellow in late Autumn.

It is also known as Alaska larch, Alaskan larch, American larch, *Amerikanische Lärche* (German), Black larch, Eastern Canadian larch, Eastern larch, *Epinette rouge* (French-Canadian), Hackmatack, Hachmack, Juniper, *Kanadalärk* (Swedish), *Lariko Amerika* (Esperanto), *Mèléze d’Amerique* (French-Canadian), Red larch, Tamarac, Tamarack (English, German), and Tamarack larch.

*Laricina* is derived from the genus name *Larix* meaning ‘larch-like (in this instance the name being transferred from *Pinus*, the species originally thought of as a larch-like pine)’.

North American Indian tribes not least some of the Chippewa used the roots as binding thread on their birch (*Betula*) canoes. They also used this thread for other things including the bags they wove from root fibre. Some of the Cree tribe used the rotting wood to tan hides (which in the process gave the skins a yellowish colour) and fresh wood, apart from fuel for the Micmac Indians, also provided material for some of the Cree to make toboggans and the Malecite tribe to prepare arrow shafts.

Branches and needles were harvested by the Anticosti tribe to make a tea.

Tamarac’s inner bark was added to the oats (*Avena*) fed to Potawatomi horses (apparently this loosened the hide). The Menominee tribe made a tea from the bark that was not only taken by humans but also given to their horses as a conditioner after distemper.

The Micmac tribe on the other hand took a bough decoction for fluid retention, and they also applied a bark poultice to swellings and sores. It was a cough remedy for the Iroquois, some of the Chippewa, the Montagnais, Abnaki and some of the Algonkin Indians. The Malecite, Micmac and Iroquois tribes also used tamarac to treat colds and venereal diseases. The Anticosti Indians took it for some kidney disorders, the Iroquois and Chippewa tribes used it for various blood ailments, and the Micmac and Malecite Indians prescribed it in the treatment of tuberculosis. It was an ingredient in a potion taken by some of the Cree when it was necessary to cause vomiting, and was taken internally by the Iroquois in a treatment for rheumatism. Some of the Algonkin used tamarac as a laxative, some of the Chippewa tribe took it for headaches, and the Iroquois turned to it to ease fever. Tamarac was applied externally by some of the Cree Indians, and the Potawatomi tribe applied it to frostbite or deep wounds, and the Chippewa Indians used it for healing burns.

In the past the very hard and strong wood was used by the early settlers for building ships then in more recent times it was felled for pulp and was also made into pit props, railway sleepers, poles and scaffolding, as well as pails, crates and boxes. Apparently the branches are particularly prized today in Alberta (Canada) for making goose and duck decoys – and in Alaska the young pliable stems sometimes furnish dogsledge runners, or boat ribs and are made into fish traps. This light orange-brown wood is used on a commercial scale today in boat-building and interior finishing, and continues to be used for railway sleepers, and telegraph poles.

Medicinally, the bark has been used to treat jaundice, liver disorders, rheumatism, skin diseases and wounds. The leaves were recommended by herbalists as a remedy for diarrhoea, dysentery and piles.