

Larrea tridentata

[Synonyms : *Covillea tridentata*, *Larrea divaricata*, *Larrea glutinosa*, *Larrea mexicana*, *Larrea tridentata* var. *tridentata*, *Zygophyllum tridentatum*]

CREOSOTE BUSH is an evergreen shrub. Native to Mexico and south-western North America (especially the Mojave Desert in southern California) it has fragrant yellow flowers and long-haired, white fruit pods.

It is also known as Chaparral, Coville, Greasewood, and *Kreosotstrauch* (German).

The leaves emit a smell reminiscent of creosote after rain or when crushed.

Tridentata is derived from Greek and Latin *tri-* (three) and Latin *denti-* (tooth) components. Although for the North American Indians creosote bush's value seems to lie primarily in its medicinal qualities (whether veterinary or human) records note that the Kawaiisu tribe have found it useful in other ways. They made a digging stick from it by fashioning a pointed end to a length of wood – and the gum when softened in fire was moulded into tool handles.

Both the Mahuna and Tohono O'Odham tribes used a plant infusion as a deodorant and a hairwash to counter dandruff, and the Tohono O'Odham Indians turned to the sap as a remedy for toothache.

A leaf decoction was used by the Kawaiisu Indians to ease collar sores found on any of their draft animals, while for the Cahuilla tribe the plant provided a remedy for horses suffering from distemper or colds.

Creosote bush was a source of human medicine for many North American Indian tribes not least the Kawaiisu and Tohono O'Odham Indians. The latter used it when it was necessary to cause vomiting and to treat fever, urinary ailments, stomach disorders and diarrhoea. They, the Hualapai and the Paiute Indians also treated colds with it – and the Hualapai used it for asthma and applied it to skin disorders. It was a remedy in the Mahuna tribe for some period problems, the Cahuilla used it to treat various bowel disorders, and the Yavapai turned to it as a remedy for sore throats and venereal diseases. Tohono O'Odham and Cahuilla Indians both prescribed it for tuberculosis. Yavapai, Diegueño and Tohono O'Odham tribes chose it for easing rheumatic symptoms, and the Tohono O'Odham and Yavapai also applied it to skin sores and wounds.

Locally the flower buds pickled in vinegar have offered an alternative condiment to capers (*Capparis spinosa*). The stems and leaves have provided a tea substitute and the twigs have been chewed to quench thirst.

The shrub offers some environmental advantage in desert regions (and is sometimes cultivated there for this) as its roots help to stabilise drifting sand.

Some authorities note that an individual plant can survive for a very long time. Carbon-dating one such in California indicated that it was 11,500 years old.

Medicinally, a twig infusion has been relied upon locally as an antiseptic lotion which can be applied to sores and wounds on both man and beast. In Mexico rheumatism is believed to have been eased by bathing the affected area in a leaf decoction. It has also been used to treat some cancers (especially leukaemia) and medical research has confirmed that in some cases it can play a significant role in such treatments – but its sale in North America

came to be banned when it was suspected that it could be the cause of various liver disorders and at the time of writing its use there is still discouraged.