

Lindera benzoin

[Synonyms : *Benzoin aestivalis*, *Benzoin benzoin*, *Benzoin odoriferum*, *Laurus benzoin*, *Laurus pseudobenzoin*, *Lindera aestivalis*, *Lindera benzoin* var. *pubescens*]

AMERICAN SPICE BUSH is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to south-eastern North America it has tiny fragrant, pale greenish-yellow flowers and leaves that turn a clear yellow in Autumn.

It is also known as Benjamin bush, Benzoin, Common spicebush, Fever bush, Northern spicebush, Snapweed, Snapwood, Spice bush, Spicewood, and Wild allspice.

It is pollinated by butterflies.

The leaves yield a lavender-like (*Lavandula*) scented oil, while that from the bark and twigs smells of wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*), and that from the berries has a camphor-like (*Cinnamomum camphora*) fragrance.

In some parts of the United States eg. Kentucky, American spice bush is a protected species in the wild.

Benzoin is derived either from an Arabian name for a different plant or a local Arabian name for an 'aromatic gum'.

During the American War of Independence (1774-1781) the leaves, twigs and bark of American spice bush were used to make a tea (which was sometimes taken medicinally), and the dried, powdered berries also provided a substitute for allspice (*Pimenta dioica*). It was in this latter capacity that it earned the name Wild allspice.

Cherokee North American Indians used the plant as a spice for meats such as ground hog or opossum – and they also made a tea with the stems.

The plant was the source of medicine for several North American tribes. The Iroquois Indians used it for treating fever and venereal disease, and they and the Cherokee took it for treating colds and measles. While the Creek and Cherokee tribes both used it to cause sweating, the former also took it to cause vomiting. In addition it was a remedy for some blood disorders, lung ailments, coughs and skin problems for Cherokee Indians.

Today some authorities suggest that the ripe berries, finely chopped, can be used as a seasoning in many savoury or sweet dishes.

The wood burns well when still green because of the amount of oil it contains.

Medicinally, it has been used to treat fever, dysentery, colds and coughs, and to expel worms.

Today a tincture of young buds is used in homoeopathic treatments.