

Maclura pomifera

[Synonyms : *Ioxylon pomiferum*, *Joxylon pomiferum*, *Maclura aurantiaca*, *Toxylon aurantiacum*, *Toxylon pomiferum*]

OSAGE ORANGE is a deciduous tree. Native to southern and central North America (specifically Arkansas and Texas) it has greenish flowers and leaves that turn yellow in Autumn.

It is also known as Bodare us, Bodark, Bodeck, Bodock, *Bois d'arc* (French), Bowwood, Hedge, Hedge apple, Hedge osage, Hedge plant, Horse apple, Maclura, *Maklura jablkovitá* (Czech), *Maklura oranžová* (Czech, Slovak), Mock orange, *Nakitsku* (Pawnee North American Indian), North American bow-wood, Orange-like maclura, Osage, Osage apple, *Pomerančovka oranžová* (Czech), Rootwood, Wild orange, Yellow wood, and *Zho-zi-zhu* (Omaha and Ponca North American Indian).

Warning – the milky sap can cause dermatitis.

Pomifera means ‘apple- bearing’ with reference to the similarity of the fruit to an apple (*Malus*).

Osage orange was well-known to local North American Indians, not least the Osage tribe who are recorded as having passed on their knowledge of the tree’s qualities to early settlers.

The bark was the source of a yellow dye for material. Records indicate that while the Kiowa Indians chose to extract the dye from the bark the Tohono O’Odham tribe originally obtained a dye from its wood and the large roots.

Kiowa Indians chose the hard wood especially for making the staff held by the singer during their Peyote rituals. This durable wood was held in the highest regard by many Indian tribes (including the Pawnee, Tohono O’Odham, Ponca, Comanche, Seminole and Omaha) for bows for both hunting and battle, and for war-clubs. It is hardly surprising therefore that its reputation spread way beyond the areas in which the Osage orange grew and it was exchanged with ‘foreign’ tribes, such as the Tewa, either as a gift or in barter. Today archers still use this very strong, flexible wood for their bows.

Osage orange would appear to have had few medicinal qualities for North American Indian tribes as little mention is made of the tree in this capacity. However it does seem that the Comanche Indians used it to treat sore eyes.

The heavy wood also came to be used for railway sleepers, wheel hubs, insulation pins and fence posts. It has been used for making artificial limbs and crutches, as well as pipes, and it has also been burnt as fuel.

In the 19th Century the prickly Osage orange was also grown quite widely in the United States as a natural fencing and windbreak.

In the past the leaves have provided food for silkworms.

The fruit have anti-oxidant properties and authorities point out that these could be of value not least to the food, cosmetics and pharmaceutical industries.