

Malus fusca

[Synonyms : *Malus diversifolia*, *Malus fusca* var. *diversifolia*, *Malus fusca* var. *levipes*, *Malus rivularis*, *Pyrus diversifolia*, *Pyrus fusca*, *Pyrus rivularis*]

OREGON CRABAPPLE is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to western North America it has fragrant pinkish-white flowers.

It is also known as Crab apple, Native crabapple, Oregon crab, Pacific crab apple, Western crab apple, and Wild crab apple.

Fusca is Latin (dark, black, dusky) meaning ‘dark brown or dusky’.

The small fruit were eaten by many North American Indian tribes including the Cowlitz, Haisla, some of the Chinook (who stored them until they were soft), the Bella Coola, Klallam, Hoh, Hanaksiala and Makah. Several tribes such as the Kitasoo, Haisla and Hanaksiala stored them for Winter food – and the Hesquiat Indians too who harvested them when sour and unripe if they were intending to keep them. It is interesting to note too that the Alaskans used the fruit as a source of pectin for making preserves – and that the Oweekeno chewed the bark to quench thirst.

The high regard for Oregon crabapple is well illustrated by the fact that it featured in Indian tribal ritual. The fruit were a special food at some Kwakiutl feasts and as such they also played an important role in Kitasoo ritual. When a child was born both the Hanaksiala and Haisla tribes would tie its afterbirth to an Oregon crabapple tree to ensure the newborn’s strong growth.

The hard wood was especially valued by several Indian tribes. It was used to make spear prongs for the Quileute when they went out hunting seal, and the Haisla and Hanaksiala Indian hunters both beat cedar rods with Oregon crabapple sticks as they drove animals within killing range. It was used by Indian fishermen – the Nitinaht caught salmon with forked sticks, some of the Salish tribe made fishing floats and halibut hooks from the durable wood, and the Quileute tribesmen fashioned their lures for sea bass hooks from it. Hesquiat, Hanaksiala and Haisla Indians, as well as some of the Salish, used this wood for making tool handles and the Haisla also chose it for making mallet heads. Haisla’, Hanaksiala’ and some of the Salish’ bows were made from it, and both the Oweekeno and Hanaksiala tribes made cooking tools from it.

The tree also seems to have been a source of medicine for many North American tribes. Both the Swinomish and Samish Indians took it for some stomach upsets – and they and the Makah tribe applied it to wounds. It was a laxative for Makah and Gitksan Indians, yet it also provided the Makah with a treatment for dysentery and diarrhoea. Lung problems generally were treated with it by the Quileute and Makah Indians – and specifically the Gitksan and Makah also used it in the treatment of tuberculosis, while the Nitinaht turned to it for easing coughs. Both the Quinault and Makah tribes relied upon it for treating some blood disorders, the Makah Indians prescribed it for various intestinal problems and heart disorders – and they also used it for healing broken bones – while the Kwakiutl Indians took it to stem internal bleeding. It was a remedy for fluid retention and rheumatism in the Gitksan tribe, and it was applied to skin disorders by the Kwakiutl Indians. The Thompson tribe used it for easing pain, the Quileute and Hoh Indians prescribed it as part of treatment for venereal disease, and the Bella Coola used it for

easing the discomfort of sore eyes. Not least in the Saanich, Makah, Nitinaht and Cowichan tribes it was appreciated as a tonic.

The red-flushed, yellow to purplish-red fruit can be eaten raw or prepared as preserves. They can also be used as an ingredient in other jams as these crabapples have a high pectin content.

Birds enjoy the fruit as well as humans.

The hard durable wood has been made into mallets, bearings and tool handles.