

Nyssa sylvatica

[Synonyms : *Nyssa aquatica*, *Nyssa caroliniana*, *Nyssa multiflora*, *Nyssa sylvatica* var. *caroliniana*, *Nyssa sylvatica* var. *dilatata*, *Nyssa sylvatica* var. *typica*, *Nyssa villosa*]

BLACK GUM is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to eastern North America it has tiny greenish-white flowers and leaves that turn scarlet to yellow in Autumn.

It is also known as Asp gum, Big tupelo, Black tupelo, Bowl gum, Chickasawichie whitewood, Cotton gum, Gum, Gum cotton wood, Hickory poplar, Ladle gum, Large-leaf white gum, Large water tupelo, Pepperidge, Plain black gum, Quartered black gum, Sour gum, Stinkwood, Swamp black gum, Swamp gum, Swamp poplar, Swamp tupelo, Tupelo, Tupelo gum, White gum, Wild pear-tree, Yellow gum, and Yellow gum tree.

Sylvatica means ‘wild, of or from woods or forests’.

Chippewa North American Indians used the wood with its limited durability (but it will not split) for making tool handles.

Black gum was a source of medicine for several North American tribes. Both the Houma and Cherokee tribes used it to treat worms – and the latter gave it to both adults and children. It was applied to wounds by the Koasati Indians, and the Creek tribe prescribed it for treating tuberculosis. Cherokee Indians also used it for some female disorders, for urinary ailments, eye problems and diarrhoea, as well as to cause vomiting.

It is said that the fruit used to be made into preserves locally.

The roots have provided a substitute for cork (*Quercus suber*).

Certainly it is particularly enjoyed by some wildlife, including black bears and foxes – and birds.

The soft but strong light yellow timber has been used in the past for wheel hubs and yokes for oxen, as well as for making the rollers used in glass factories, hatter’s blocks and the soles of shoes. Today it can be used for building wharves, for veneering and pulp, as well as for making crates.