

Oxydendrum arboreum

[Synonyms : *Andromeda arborea*, *Lyonia arborea*]

SOURWOOD is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to south-eastern North America it has tiny sweet scented, white flowers and leaves that turn yellow, purple and scarlet in Autumn. It is also known as Arrowwood, Elk tree, *Kysloun stromový* (Czech), Lily-of-the-valley tree, Sorrel gum, Sorrel tree, Sour gum, Titi, Titi tree, and Tree sorrel.

Arboreum is derived from Latin *arbor* (tree) meaning ‘tree-like or tending to be woody’.

Authorities draw attention to sourwood honey from these flowers (particularly enjoyed authorities note by North American Cherokee Indians). The honey is understood to be especially clear, palatable and much sought after today.

Locally little boys (and no doubt not so little boys as well) made whistles from the red twigs, and the hard and heavy wood has been fashioned into tool handles and used for turning. (The Cherokee tribe used the wood for making the runners for their sledges, arrow shafts, tobacco pipe stems and butter paddles, as well as for carving and fuel.)

The leaves as hunters in the area usually know are alleged to be able to quench thirst.

Foliage is enjoyed by deer.

Records show that sourwood was familiar to several North American Indian tribes as a source of medicine. For the Cherokee it was a versatile remedy used for some lung problems, indigestion and mouth ulcers. They also used it as an ingredient in a treatment for easing diarrhoea, and they prescribed it as a sedative. Whereas the Catawba Indians valued it for treating various period problems.

Apart from interior finishing, this wood has been used locally for making the runners on sledges, for tool handles and bearings for machinery. It has also been burnt as fuel.

Medicinally, the leaves have been used to treat heart conditions and fevers.