

Pinus edulis

[Synonyms : *Caryopitys edulis*, *Picea edulis*, *Pinus cembroides* var. *edulis*, *Pinus edulis* var. *fallax*, *Pinus monphylla* var. *edulis*]

NUT PINE is an evergreen tree. Native to south-western United States it has needle-like leaves and glossy light brown cones.

It is also known as Arizona pine, Colorado pine, Colorado pinyon pine, Common pine, Common pinyon, Foxtail pine, Mesa pine, New Mexican pine, New Mexico pinyon pine, Pinon pine, Pinyon, Rocky Mountain nut pine, Rocky Mountain piñon, Rocky Mountain pinyon, True pinyon, Two-leaf pinyon, Two-leaved pine, and Two-needle pinyon.

The flowers are pollinated by the wind.

Warning – prolonged contact with the fresh wood can cause dermatitis and allergic breathing problems.

The sweet-tasting nuts (for which humans and wildlife compete) have been known by many names including Indian nuts, Pignolia nuts, Pine nuts, and Pinyon nuts.

Edulis is Latin (eatable).

The tree provided food (and a reason for festivity at harvest time) for quite a few North American Indian tribes and for some such as the Isleta, some of the Apache and the Navajo Indians these small brown nuts were very much a staple food. Gosiute and Tewa Indians ate the nuts too, as did some of the Apache who like the Isleta, Zuni, some of the Keresan and the Navajo tribes stored them for Winter food. Apart from their general diet the nuts were served by the Hopi at the end of feasts and, in addition to gruel, the Navajo made them into special delicacies including butters and cakes). The Hualapai tribe also prepared the nuts as a paste, cakes or soup, and some of the Apache Indians recognised them as an important part of the puberty rituals which their daughters participated in at the appropriate age. The Havasupai tribe dried and ground the seeds into butter (as well as using them in soup) and some of the Apache Indians made them into special delicacies and added them to puddings. Sprigs of foliage provided flavouring for some cooked dishes prepared by the Havasupai, the pitch was chewed like gum by the Navajo and some of the Apache, and the Hualapai Indians used needles make a tea. For some of the Navajo the inner bark was also viewed as emergency rations or famine food.

Several Indian tribes included parts of the tree – and where the Navajo tribe was concerned even the tree itself – in their rituals. The pollen was significant for some of the Apache Indians and the gum and/or pollen featured for both the Tewa and Hopi tribes. But the fact that pinyon appears to be predominant in much of Navajo tribal legend indicates the tree's major role in that tribe's ceremonial ritual. For them its wood was used for their ceremonial wands, its gum was burnt as incense, pitch was painted on the corpse during mourning and before burial, and both needles and pitch featured in the Navajo War Dance.

It is probably not surprising that pinyon attracted various superstitions. For instance Hopi Indians smeared gum on the forehead as a protection from witchcraft.

The yellow wood was used for building by the Navajo and Havasupai tribes, and the former as well as some of the Apache Indians used it to make babies' cradles. Some of the Navajo

used it to make looms, tools of various kinds, fence posts, saddle horns and toys. The Tewa, Havasupai and Navajo tribes also burnt the wood as fuel.

Nut pine's gum was in demand too. The Hopi, Tewa, Havasupai, Hualapai and some of the Apache and some of the Navajo all used it when making jugs, cups, water bottles and other containers such as baskets for both waterproofing and an adhesive. In the latter capacity the gum also offered the Hopi Indians with a means of sticking down their turquoise mosaics and some of the Navajo secured some of their jewelry with it. It was used for making various dyes and paint by the Hopi, Tewa and Navajo Indians, as well as some of the Keresan – and the Hualapai also used the gum to glue their arrowheads to the shafts and improved their grip on rope by spreading it over their palms.

Some Navajo Indians made the dried seeds up into bracelets, necklaces and other jewelry. One reported less common use was identified by some of the Apache tribe. Apparently they used the pitch to remove facial hair.

Little value seems to have been placed on the tree for veterinary medicine although the Havasupai are said to have applied the gum to cuts on their horses.

Without considering any beneficial medicinal properties for human beings the versatility already apparent explains why parts of the tree were viewed as a cash crop for some North American Indian tribes. The Havasupai Indians and some of the Keresan traded the nuts for cash (the former sold them to trading posts) – and the Navajo Indians harvested nuts and seeds which they sold commercially or bartered with other tribes.

It was a source of medicine for many North American Indian tribes. Some of the Navajo Indians used it to treat headaches, it was also a cold cure for them and some of the Apache tribes, and the Hualapai and some of the Navajo used it for easing coughs. Hopi Indians viewed it as a treatment for tuberculosis – and some of the Navajo prescribed it for fever and influenza. It was taken by the Zuni for fluid retention, and they and some of the Apache also used it for treating venereal disease. The Navajo Indians and some of the Keresan took it to cause vomiting, and some of the Navajo used it to ease earache and applied it to burns. Various skin problems were treated with it by some of the Keresan, the Tewa, Zuni, Navajo, Hopi and Isleta Indians. The Navajo, Tewa, Hopi, Havasupai and Isleta tribes also applied it to cuts.

Today the nuts are eaten raw, roasted or in sweetmeats.

During the second half of the 20th Century these nuts became a fashionable health food under the name 'pignolia nuts'.. They have also provided an ingredient for commercial bakers for puddings, pastries and confectionery. Now into the 21st Century the tree still continues as a prime commercial source of these pine kernels – but (as with singleleaf pinyon, *Pinus monophylla*) the thousands of tons of nuts harvested are threatening the trees' reproduction and significantly depriving local wildlife of food.

The trees have been sold commercially as Christmas trees.

The seeds are eaten by very many animals and birds, especially bears, deer, wild turkeys and a particular kind of jay known locally as a pinyon jay.

Nut pine is believed to be a state emblem for New Mexico in the United States (certainly one of this genus is) and was adopted there in the mid-20th Century.

The soft and brittle wood has provided a source of charcoal and pulp and has also been burnt locally as fuel. It has been made into railway sleepers and mine supports too.