

*Pinus sabiniana*

**CALIFORNIA FOOTHILL PINE** is an evergreen tree. Native to western United States it has needle-like leaves and large hanging, football-like, chocolate-brown cones.

It is also known as Bull pine, Digger pine, Grayleaf pine, Gray pine, Grey pine, Nut pine, and Pinon pine.

The flowers are pollinated by wind. The crushed leaves give an aromatic smell. The cones can weigh from as little as ¾ lb. to as much as 2¼ lb. (and could be dangerous, if not lethal, for any one or thing beneath when they fall on a windy day).

The distilled wood yields a colourless aromatic liquid known as ‘Abietine’.

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

*Sabineana* is for some authorities most likely to be derived from *sabini* (the Latin name of an ancient tribe known as Sabinum occupying a central part of Italy before Rome was founded), but for others it is derived from *sabina* (Latin name for *Juniperus sabina*) meaning ‘like that plant (savin)’.

Quite a few authorities note that the common name Digger pine is actually dismissive. Early European settlers are said to have referred to many of the small, central Californian Indian tribes (who often dug for food such as bulbs and roots) in a disparaging way with a term ‘digger’. These newcomers were equally contemptuous of a tree that they believed offered them so little. Although they took some advantage of medicinal properties learnt from local Indian tribes, they had little regard for the tree’s wood or for the paltry shade it sheds.

The lightweight and soft wood from this tree was used for building by the North American Wintoon Indians, and the Mendocino Indian tribe used it for making their drums.

Miwok Indians used needles for bedding, floorcovering and thatching. The Kawaiisu tribe used them for the outer covering of their Winter homes as additional insulation.

Indians in the Mahuna tribe believed that these trees protected them from lightning.

The small nutritious, dark brown nuts or seeds were eaten by quite a few North American Indian tribes including the Mewuk, Pomo (who stored them for Winter food), Costanoan, Shasta, Tubatulabal, Kawaiisu and Miwok Indians. The Mendocino Indian tribe ate the inner bark when food was scarce in Winter, and Wailaki children chewed the pitch like gum.

Pitch offered an adhesive for the Yuki and Pomo tribes. The former used it to fix feathers to their bodies when dressing for battle, and the latter secured the feathers on their arrows with it. Mendocino Indian tribesmen processed the pitch for tattooing.

While the Karok tribe adorned their dance dresses with the nuts, Kawaiisu Indians used them to prepare tobacco for smoking.

Various parts offered basketry material. The Miwok Indians used the twigs and rootlets, the Pomo tribe used the roots, while the Mewuk preferred the sprouts.

Records show that the tree was valued in some tribes for medicinal qualities. Both the Mendocino Indian and Miwok tribes applied it to burns and various skin disorders. The Wailaki, Yokia and Costanoan Indians all used it to ease rheumatic pain – and the Yokia turned to it for a treatment for tuberculosis.

Primarily the soft wood has been burnt as fuel although in the past it has also been made into railway sleepers.

Although the leaves are said to be generally unpalatable, the seeds are enjoyed by various birds and rodents (including some kinds of squirrel, jay and woodpecker) and by livestock.