

Populus alba

[Synonyms : *Populus alba* var. *bolleana*, *Populus alba* var. *nivea*, *Populus alba* var. *pyramidalis*, *Populus major*]

WHITE POPLAR is a deciduous tree. Native to Asia and Europe it has hairy catkins and leaves that turn yellow or red in Autumn.

It is also known as Abby, *Abeel* (Dutch), Abele, Abele tree, *Álamo blanco* (Spanish), Arbale, Aspen, *Bian bouais* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Blianc-bouais* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Dutch arbel, *Chitabagnu* (Punjabi), *Choupo Branco* (Portuguese), European white poplar, *Fras* (Kashmiri), *Gin-doro* (Japanese), *Hakuyo* (Japanese), *Hopeapoppeli* (Finnish), *Kabudah* (Persian), *Kawagh* (Arabic), Lady poplar, *Linda* (Czech), *Luq abjad* (Maltese), *Peuplier blanc* (French), *Safeda* (Hindi), *Silberpappel* (German), Silver-leaf poplar, Silver-leaved poplar, Silver-leaved tree, Silver poplar, *Silverpoppel* (Swedish), *Solv-Poppel* (Danish), *Topol' biely* (Slovak), *Topol bílý* (Czech), White back, White wood, and *Xin bai yang* (Chinese); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of courage, the female principle, resurrection, and time.

Alba means 'white' with reference to the undersides of the leaves.

The leaves can provide a convenient weather warning as the pale undersides are often prominent in a slight wind that can precede rain in Britain in the Summer.

Two particular legends in Greek mythology are said to relate to the white poplar. In one Hades brings Leuce (a daughter of Oceanus) to his Underworld where she dies a natural death and is transformed into a white poplar growing in the Elysian Fields. In the other after Phaethon's death when he loses control of the sun's chariot and falls down into the river Eridanus his sisters, the Heliads, were inconsolable and were transformed into poplar trees on its banks. As their tears oozed from the trees the sun god, Helios, converted them into amber which dropped into the river. [Authorities have noted that while this could well have been applied to a pine tree as its fossilized sap is the amber which has been used to make jewellery for thousands of years, this phenomenon does not actually occur with poplars.]

The shieldmakers adopted the white poplar as their emblem.

The bark yields a yellow dye.

In India the wood is used to make packing cases and matchboxes.

Some of the Chippewa Indian tribe in North America harvested the wood for paper pulp. The tree's inner bark also provided a tonic for the Iroquois tribe, while some of the Chippewa took an infusion of bark and root for some blood diseases and also included it in a wash applied to ease rheumatism.

Today the wood is used commercially for flooring and paper.

Medicinally, the young buds were used by herbalists for improving eyesight, leaf juice was used for treating earache, and powdered bark was a remedy for sciatica. In India the latter was applied for treating various skin diseases.