

Populus angustifolia

[Synonyms : *Populus balsamifera* var. *angustifolia*, *Populus canadensis* var. *angustifolia*, *Populus fortissima*, *Populus salicifolia*, *Populus x sennii*, *Populus tweedyi*]

NARROWLEAF COTTONWOOD is a deciduous tree. Native to the western United States and northern Mexico, it has red male catkins and green female catkins and leaves that turn dull yellow in Autumn.

It is also known as Balsam, Bitter cottonwood, Black cottonwood, Cottonwood, Lanceleaf cottonwood, Mountain cottonwood, Narrowleaf poplar, Narrowleaved cottonwood, Narrow leaved poplar, Rydberg cottonwood, Smoothbark cottonwood, Willow cottonwood, Willowleaf cottonwood, and Willowleaved cottonwood.

Male catkins are more dense and shorter than the female catkins growing on separate trees. The minute flowers are pollinated by the wind.

Angustifolia is derived from Latin *angusti-* (narrow) and *-folia* (leaved) components.

North American Indian tribes including Navajo, Zuni and some of the Apache chewed the buds like chewing gum, while the Montana Indian tribe harvested the inner bark for food.

The high regard in which the tree was held by the Zuni tribe is indicated by the use of slender twigs in the ritual preparation of offerings destined for ancestral gods.

The Montana Indian tribe fed their horses young twigs when no other better fodder was available.

Records would suggest that the tree was important for the Montana Indian tribe as they also collected the soft wood for fuel and viewed it as a source of material for providing shelter during the Winter season too. The inner bark (apart from food) was added to tobacco mixtures smoked by the tribe.

Navajo Indians made parts of their babies' cradles from the wood, and the Gosiute tribe used the shoots for basketry.

The tree was discovered during the 1804-1806 Lewis and Clark Expedition that explored the then unknown North American territories west of the Mississippi and crossed the Rocky Mountains.

Narrowleaf cottonwood has been cultivated quite widely in North American towns as a shade or street tree. It is also planted for erosion control and is valued for stabilising streambanks.

The greyish-brown wood has been used locally for fuel and for making fence posts, crates, boxes and pallets. It has also been used for pulp.

Some hawks and eagles will nest in the tree and it provides cover for many more birds, as well as for deer and various small mammals. Beavers are said to be particularly partial to the shoots.

Medicinally, local herbalists have recommended the use of a flower decoction to stem internal bleeding and a tea made from the fresh flowers as a blood purifier. Infected teeth or gums have also been painted with flowers dipped in water.