

*Populus fremontii*

[Synonyms : *Populus fremontii* var. *mesetae*, *Populus fremontii* var. *pubescens*]

**FRÉMONT'S COTTONWOOD** is a deciduous tree. Native from California to Arizona in North America and to northern Mexico, it has red male and green female catkins and leaves that turn yellow in Autumn.

It is also known as Alamo cottonwood, Arizona cottonwood, Cottonwood, Desert apricot, Fremont cottonwood, Fremont poplar, Meseta cottonwood, Rio Grande cottonwood, Sweet cottonwood, Valley cottonwood, Western cottonwood, and Wislizenus cottonwood.

*Fremontii* commemorates an American explorer, topographer, soldier and politician, John Charles Frémont (1813-1890) who ran twice (unsuccessfully) for the presidency of the United States. He explored and surveyed the American West, first the upper reaches of the region between the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers in 1838 and 1839, and then parts of the Des Moines River in 1841. From then until 1846 he was involved in exploring what would become the Oregon Trail and also parts of the Sierra Nevada. In his journals he made numerous topographical notes (which included observations on flora and fauna) during his explorations as well as maps, collected many notable shrubs and trees that were subsequently studied and named by eminent botanists and for many historians became the Pathfinder. At the end of that period took part in the Mexican-American War (1846-1848). He became one of the first Senators for the newly formed Californian state after he had settled there in 1849 and his anti-slavery views recommended him as a Republican candidate for the presidency in 1856 (when he was defeated). During the American Civil War (1861-1865) he served only from 1861-1862 as he resigned to avoid serving under General John Pope (1822-1892). Again in 1864 Frémont was a Republican presidential candidate but this time he stood down in favour of Abraham Lincoln. Then from 1878- 1881 he was Governor of Arizona Territory and in 1890 was appointed Major-General on the retired list. Ultimately he died in New York from peritonitis.

Both the Havasupai North American Indian tribe and some of the Tohono O'Odham chewed the young green pods like chewing gum.

The tree's wood was used by the Havasupai and some of the Tohono O'Odham Indians for making fence posts and for basketry, and the Havasupai also used it for building and for making cooking equipment such as bowls and plates. The Cahuilla tribe made mortars (as in 'pestle and mortar') from the wood, and the Havasupai made their drums from it. For the Mendocino Indian tribe, the Diegueño and some of the Tohono O'Odham this wood also meant a source of fuel.

In veterinary medicine Mendocino Indian and Cahuilla tribes both included the tree among the ingredients used to treat their horses.

A bark decoction was applied to wounds by several North American tribes including Kawaiisu, Mendocino Indian, Cahuilla, Diegueño and Yuki tribes. Diegueño Indians also applied it to insect stings, and the Yuki and some of the Tohono O'Odham put it on skin sores.

Apart from this records show that it was used for treating headaches and rheumatism by the Cahuilla, and the Yuki tribe used it for easing colds and sore throats.

It is in the cottonwood thickets along the Mojave River (southern California, north of San Bernardino) that great flocks of buzzards roost nightly for several weeks in the Autumn on their annual migration south. Apparently this staging post is not as popular on the return journey in the following Spring. The trees can also provide cover, nesting and/or forage for other birds and animals as well, including eagles, hawks, heron, woodpeckers, elk, deer, beavers and squirrels. It offers shade to livestock, and because horses seem to enjoy eating the inner bark it is said the tree gained the name 'sweet cottonwood'. Authorities note that it provides particularly good cover for small non-game birds and animals.

This wood has been used for veneering and pulp manufacture, as well as for making pallets, and food storage crates and boxes. It has also been used locally for fence posts and has been collected for fuel.

Frémont's cottonwood has been cultivated as an ornamental, shade tree and windbreak. Authorities also note that it has been grown to create bird habitat (hardly surprising in view of the thickets north of San Bernardino) and has also been included in some revegetation programmes not least because of its rapid early growth.