

Populus tremula

[Synonyms : *Populus pseudotremula*]

ASPEN is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to Asia, North Africa and Europe it has yellowish and purplish-grey catkins and leaves that turn yellow in Autumn.

It is also known as *Aethnen* (Welsh), Aps, Apsen-tree, Asp (English, Swedish), *Aspe* (German), Common aspen, *Espe* (German), European aspen, *Haapa* (Finnish), Old wives' tongue, *Osika* (Czech), *Pappel* (German), *Peuplier tremble* (French), Pipple, Poplar, Quakin ash, Quaking aspen, Quakin esp, Shaking asp, Shiver tree, Snapsen, *Topol osika* (Czech), *Topol' osikový* (Slovak), *Tremble* (French), Trembling aspen, Trembling poplar, *Tremolo* (Esperanto, Italian), Woman's tongue, and *Zitter-Pappel* (German); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of excess of sensibility, fear, lamentation, and scandal.

The leaves have flattened leaf stalks that allow their free movement in the wind.

Tremula is Latin (trembling, quivering, quaking) with reference to the movement of the leaves. Authorities note that in coastal sand dunes in the Netherlands there are some subterranean aspen trees. Apparently these living trees are 50-100 feet tall although only twigs from their tops can be seen above the sand.

A Christian tradition holds that the wood of the aspen was used to make the Cross on which Christ was crucified and that it trembles at the memory of this. Further it claims the aspen to be a 'tree of mourning, pride and sinful arrogance'.

In England aspen was sometimes planted near the door to protect the house from thieves.

This wood is used today for making matches and the manufacture of pulp – and the pulp is used by the textile and paper industries, the latter for example for wallpaper.

The aspen has been considered a cure for fever for a very, very long time by herbalists. No doubt when the Doctrine of Signatures was holding full sway in the Middle Ages and a little later (this contended that the perceived behaviour or appearance of a plant indicated the medical problems it was best able to cure) the tremulous nature of the tree suggested the association in this instance. Today it can be used for various urinary complaints, anorexia, stomach ailments and liver disorders. It is also used in a few proprietary medicines.