

*Populus tremuloides*

[Synonyms : *Populus atheniensis*, *Populus aurea*, *Populus cercidiphylla*, *Populus graeca*, *Populus tremula* subsp. *tremuloides*, *Populus tremuloides* var. *aurea*, *Populus tremuloides* var. *cercidiphylla*, *Populus tremuloides* var. *intermedia*, *Populus tremuloides* var. *magnifica*, *Populus tremuloides* var. *rhomboidea*, *Populus tremuloides* var. *tremuloides*, *Populus tremuloides* var. *vancouveriana*, *Populus vancouveriana*]

**AMERICAN ASPEN** is a deciduous tree. Native to North America (from northern Mexico to Alaska), it has leaves that turn gold in Autumn.

It is also known as Abele tree, American poplar, *Amerikanische Espe* (German), *Amerikansk asp* (Swedish), Aspen poplar, Canadian aspen, Cottonwood tree, Mountain ash, Old wives tongue, *Peuplier faux-tremble* (French, French-Canadian), Poplar, Popple, Quaker asp, Quaking asp, Quaking aspen, Quiver leaf, *Topol osikovity* (Czech), *Tremble* (French-Canadian), Trembling aspen, Trembling poplar, Trembling tree, and White poplar.

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

*Tremuloides* is made up of *tremula* from *Populus tremula* (aspen) and Greek *-oides* (like) components meaning ‘like aspen’.

One of its common names Quaking aspen refers of course to the trembling of the leaves on their very thin stalks.

A Christian legend has it that because the poplar was used to make Christ’s Cross the tree trembles in memory of this.

American aspen’s involvement in Indian myth and superstition indicates its importance to many of the North American Indian tribes. Navajo legend relates how the tree fulfils a significant role in the Sun’s House Chant as the bear rubs his back against it before any other trees. Thompson Indians on the other hand believed that a bath in a branch decoction would secure protection from witchcraft.

While sap provided food for some of the Tanana tribe and food flavouring for some of the Apache, from records the inner bark seems to have been a little more popular as it was eaten by some of the Cree, by the Blackfoot and the Montana Indian tribes, by some of the Apache (who apart from eating it raw also boiled it or baked it into cakes) and some of the Navajo for whom it offered emergency rations. The layer between the wood and the inner bark (more familiar as ‘cambium’ to botanists) was also a source of food for some of the Tanana Indian tribe – and a snack for Blackfoot children. The wood itself (often when rotten) was used for smoking meat and fish by some of the Tanana and some of the Cree tribes.

This lightweight wood had many other uses for North American tribes. Some of the Thompson used it to make their dugout canoes and some of the Chippewa Indians felled it for paper pulp. Logs provided scrapers for deer hide for the Okanagan-Colville and both the Crow and Cheyenne built their Sun Dance lodges from it. Paiute Indians and some of the Cree used the wood for tent and tepee poles, and the Montana Indian tribe used the wood too for making their Winter shelters. Not least it was a source of fuel for the Paiute and Montana Indian tribes, as well as some of the Tanana – and in perhaps less practical vein the Shuswap fashioned whistles out of it.

Unlike the Shuswap both the Blackfoot and some of the Cree Indians preferred the bark for making whistles, and the latter also used the bark for their bear traps. The bark meant cordage for the Montana Indian tribe and a source of material for hats for the Klamath Indians. It was fodder for Blackfoot and Montana Indian horses – and records note Thompson Indian observations that bark provided food for beavers. One unusual use for bark powder was attributed to the Okanagan-Colville who valued this as a foot and under-arm deodorant – and Micmac Indians had the bark prescribed for them as an appetite enhancer.

American aspen was smoked during ceremonials by the Hopis and the inner bark offered an ingredient for a tobacco mixture smoked by the Montana Indian tribe.

Both the Potawatomi and Iroquois tribes used the bark to treat their horses – and the latter also used it for cats and dogs.

As a source of medicine the American aspen was familiar to quite a few of the North American tribes including the Flathead and Isleta. Both the Haisla and Gitksan tribes appreciated strong laxative qualities, and the former and the Hanaksiala used it for treating various oral problems. It was a cold cure for the Micmac, Meskwaki children, the Penobscot, some of the Delaware and some of the Tanana. Meskwaki (both adults and children), the Paiute and some of the Tanana all used it as a remedy for coughs. Iroquois Indians turned to it for treating pleurisy (and measles), some of the Carrier tribe relied upon it for easing stomach upsets and it was taken for wind by Thompson and Okanagan-Colville tribes. Both the Tewa and children of the Iroquois had it prescribed for some urinary problems, and Paiute Indians used it to treat fever. It was a remedy for worms for the Iroquois (adults and children), the Montagnais, Sikani, Abnaki, and some of the Cree. Salish, Bella Coola, Iroquois, some of the Cree, the Thompson and Shoshoni Indian tribes used American aspen to treat venereal disease. Authorities note its use during childbirth by both the Blackfoot and Chippewa tribes. Some of the Okanagan-Colville and Algonkin tribes and the Thompson Indians all included it in their remedies for rheumatism. Bruised eyes were treated with it by the Okanagan-Colville, some of the Cree tribe used it for insect stings, and it was applied to wounds by Sikani, Gitksan and Chippewa Indians.

In more recent times the soft wood has been used for manufacturing paper pulp.

American aspen has been adopted as an emblem by Yukon Territory in north-western Canada.

Medicinally, herbalists have recommended the bark primarily for the treatment of fevers but also for digestive disorders, malaria, gout, rheumatism, gonorrhoea, urinary infections, diarrhoea, skin diseases and burns. Today it can still be used for various urinary complaints, anorexia, stomach ailments and liver disorders.