

*Populus trichocarpa*

[Synonyms : *Populus balsamifera* var. *californica*, *Populus balsamifera* subsp. *trichocarpa*, *Populus hastata*, *Populus trichocarpa* var. *cupulata*, *Populus trichocarpa* var. *hastata*, *Populus trichocarpa* var. *ingrata*]

**WESTERN BALSAM POPLAR** is a deciduous tree. Native to western North America it has leaves that turn golden-yellow in Autumn

It is also known as Balm cottonwood, Balsam cottonwood, Balsam poplar, Black cottonwood, Black poplar, California poplar, Cottonwood, *Jättepoppel* (Swedish), *Topol chlupatoplodý* (Czech), and Western balm.

The tiny flowers are pollinated by the wind.

*Trichocarpa* is derived from Greek *tricho-* (hair) and *carpo-* (fruit) components meaning ‘with hairy fruit’ with reference to the seeds.

The sweet inner bark, and the layer between the wood and the inner bark (known to botanists as cambium) were eaten fresh in Spring.

Apparently the yellow gum from the buds was applied to baskets and boxes as a waterproofing medium.

Local North American Indian tribes also used bud glue to stick arrowheads and feathers on to their arrow shafts. It was also boiled in grease and included in paint.

Authorities believe this to be the most commonly cultivated ornamental balsam poplar – often for hedging or screening (although it is brittle and high winds can split off large branches).

The lightweight, greyish-white to brown wood was burnt as fuel by local Indian tribes for smoking fish and the larger pieces were sometimes made into small dugout canoes.. In more recent times it has been used for veneering, the manufacture of pulp and plywood, as well as for cooperage and making boxes.

Records indicate that for wildlife this tree offers nesting sites and food. The former are made by songbirds, woodpeckers and owls, as well as raccoons and squirrels. It is the beaver however that relies on western balsam poplar for food and, incidentally, building material.

Medicinally, some authorities note that the aromatic gum from the sticky buds was used locally as part of treatments for whooping cough, tuberculosis, sore throats and wounds – and baldness.