

*Ulmus americana*

[Synonyms : *Ulmus alba*, *Ulmus americana* var. *aspera*, *Ulmus americana* var. *floridana*, *Ulmus floridana*]

**AMERICAN ELM** is a deciduous tree. Native to eastern North America it has tiny purplish- or greenish-yellow flowers and leaves that turn yellow in Autumn.

It is also known as American soft elm, American weeping elm, American white elm, *Ezho zho* (Omaha and Ponca North American Indian), Florida elm, Gray elm, Gray hard elm, Hard gray elm, *Pe* (Dakota North American Indian), Rock elm, Soft elm, Springwood, Swamp elm, *Taitsako taka* (Pawnee North American Indian), Water elm, Weeping elm, and White elm: and in flower language is said to be a symbol of patriotism.

Warning – in rare cases the pollen oil can cause dermatitis.

*Americana* means ‘of or from America (North or South)’.

North American Indian tribes such as the Omaha, Ponca, Pawnee and Dakota used American elm wood to make pestles and mortars for grinding the corn (*Zea*) and for preparing perfumes and medicines. They also used the tough and heavy, light brown wood for saddle trees for storing their saddles. The Iroquois used bark fibre to make their dog sledge harnesses, and the Chippewa tribe used it for roofing. Forked trees provided building posts for the Pawnee, Ponca, Dakota and Omaha tribes, and they also burnt the wood as fuel. The children were not left out of the picture as Dakota, Omaha, Ponca and Pawnee youngsters all made their popgun wads from the fibrous red inner bark.

Cheyenne Indians made a coffee-like drink from the inner bark.

The tree was also a source of medicine for several North American Indian tribes. Both the Mohican and Delaware Indians used it to ease coughs and colds, the Houma tribe prescribed it for dysentery, and the Iroquois and Potawatomi Indians took it to treat diarrhoea. It was prescribed for Choctaw and Iroquois women suffering period problems, and it was used by the Cheyenne and Iroquois for childbirth disorders. Both Penobscot and Iroquois tribes used it to treat internal bleeding, Koasati Indians turned to it for treating appendicitis, Iroquois Indians valued it as a remedy for stomach upsets, and the Montana Indian tribe used it for cancer. Some of the Chippewa Indians looked to it for a treatment for venereal diseases, it was used for sore eyes by the Meskwaki, and the Koasati tribe applied it to wounds.

European settlers and subsequent generations of Americans have used the tree’s hard timber for boat and shipbuilding, as well as for an amazing range of other items including milking stools, coffins, barrel staves, beehive inner frames, wheel-hubs, tool handles and woven wooden baskets. Today it is still used when available for making furniture.

In the United States the tree became a state emblem for Massachusetts in 1941 and for North Dakota in 1947.

American elm has been subject to the ravages of Dutch elm disease which progressed through the European Continent in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and ultimately reached the North American Continent. It is said to have begun its advance there from New England.