



Ethnobotany of Native Trees at Heritage Trail at Cook's Corner in Middlesex County near Locust Hill

April 2025

Mockernut Hickory – Wood used for tool handles, skis, baseball bats, furniture and lumber. Nuts are a preferred food for wildlife, particularly squirrels, black bears, foxes, rabbits, and white tail deer. Edible by humans. (**CNT)

Shagbark Hickory – Hickory is the densest and hardest commercially available hardwood in the United States. Hickory milk is made by boiling the hickory nuts in water, the oil in the nuts will then separate itself from the nuts and mix with the water. After boiling for 30 minutes the hickory milk is ready. Now you just have to strain away all the nuts and the delicious vegan hickory milk is ready to drink either hot or cold. Native Americans used an altered version of this process to make hickory butter and cream. (Mainlywoodwork.com)

Hickory nuts were a food source for Native Americans, who used the kernel milk to make corn cakes and hominy. The fresh small shoots have been steamed to make an inhalant for treating headaches. (healthbenefitstimes.com)

Wood is heavy, tough, hard, and very strong – one of strongest commercial woods. See above. (CNT) Nuts have buttery and sweet taste.

Sycamore – Songbirds eat the seeds. Large, old hollow trees serve as roosting and den sites for wildlife. Have the largest trunk diameter of any North American hardwood.

(CNT) Native Americans often used the entire trunk of the sycamore tree to make dugout canoes. Some of their canoes were 65 feet long. storiesinscience.weebly.com

Bark: Tea from inner bark used to treat dysentery, colds, lung ailments, measles, and cough. Bark has emetic and laxative effects. (bio.brandeis.edu/fieldbio/medicinal_plants/pages/Sycamore.html)

Red Maple – Wood used for furniture, bowls, and paper pulp. Birds and mice eat the seeds, and deer browse the young sprouts. Fruit and buds are a primary food source for gray squirrels in late winter and early spring. (CNT)

Leaves, twigs, and bark have been used to remedy eye conditions for at least four hundred years, but its folk uses predate this.

An infusion of the bark, twigs, and leaves were used externally to treat inflamed eyes, infected eyes, sties, and the eye complaints associated with aging (discharges, sore eyes, hazy vision, etc.). (healthbenefitstimes.com)

Red Cedar – Resistant to decay and used for fence posts and poles. Natural oils repel insects, and it is used for chests, closet linings, and pet bedding. Once used for pencils. Berries give it its characteristic flavor. Favorite food of many birds. (CNT)

Can purify indoor air and be used for cedar baths. As a tea, it can help to reduce fevers, rheumatic symptoms and relieve symptoms of chest colds and the flu. (creehealth.org)

Christmas Fern - There aren't many native ferns that stay green right through the winter holiday season, so it's no surprise this plant was awarded Christmas fern as its common name. Another possible reason is that the individual leaflets on the fronds resemble Christmas stockings. (www.thespruce.com)

Christmas Ferns were used by early New England settlers as a Christmas decoration. Although Christmas Ferns do not appear to have any edible uses, Native American groups used it for medicinal purposes. The Cherokee, for instance, used Christmas Fern externally to treat rheumatism, rubbing a decoction of the root on the affected area. An infusion of the plant was also taken internally for rheumatism. The Cherokee used Christmas Fern to treat stomachache, pneumonia, toothache, and chills. The Iroquois also used the plant to treat a wide range of medical problems, including rheumatism, consumption, convulsions, and fevers. (wildadirondacks.org/adirondack-ferns-christmas-fern-polystichum-acrostichoides.html)

Tulip Poplar – Light, soft, easily worked wood used for lumber, trim, veneer, and fuel. Sprouts and buds are major food of deer, and birds and squirrels eat the seeds. The flowers are important nectar source for honey production. (CNT)

The inner bark and leaves were used medicinally by Native Americans and early settlers for a variety of ills, including a bark tea for fevers, diarrhea, toothaches, coughs and pinworms. During the Civil War when Confederate supplies of quinine used to treat malaria were limited tulip poplar was used to treat the soldiers. Tulip poplar has been called “canoe tree” because Native Americans used it to make dugouts. (<http://medicinalherbinfo.org>)

Spicebush - Caterpillars of the spicebush swallowtail butterfly feed on the leaves of this plant. (Common Native Shrubs and Woody Vines of Virginia)

Its berries have a mild allspice flavor, and when dried and crushed its bark can pass for a mild cinnamon substitute. Used by Native Americans used the bark to make tea as a “blood purifier” and for sweating, colds, rheumatism and anemia Berries were used to make a tea for coughs, cramps, croup and measles. Spicebush leaves contain a small amount of camphor and can be used as an insect repellent. Native Americans and early settlers also used the plant to make a beverage and to flavor game.”

(www.heppy.org/spicebush)

American Hornbeam (Ironwood, Musclewood) – Hornbeam wood is tough, close grained, heavy, and strong. Its bark resembles muscles. It has been used for levers, tool handles, wooden cogs, mallets, and wedges. Seeds are a valuable food source for gray squirrels and birds. (CNT) White-tailed deer eat the leaves and branches for nutrients. Native birds, turkeys, grouse, and squirrels rely on the seeds and leaf buds from this tree as part of their diet. The American hornbeam is also a host plant for the eastern tiger swallowtail and red-spotted purple caterpillars. Because it doesn't crack, the wood from the American hornbeam was used by early settlers for making dishes such as bowls. (wp.towson.edu/glenarboretum/home/american-hornbeam)

Loblolly Pine – Grueling beginnings: In the 16th century, sailors at sea ate a gruel that was called loblolly (“lob” for bubbling and “lolly” for thick soup). Since this pine tree grows near thickly mired lowlands, its common name may be derived from the porridge that had such a swamplike consistency. (lewisginter.org/loblolly-pine-native)

Used for lumber, paper pulp, pilings, and fuel. Provides habitat for birds, deer, squirrels, and other wildlife species. Large trees are common nesting site for ospreys and bald eagles. (CNT)

The turpentine obtained from the resin of all pine trees is antiseptic, diuretic, rubefacient and vermifuge. It is a valuable remedy used internally in the treatment of kidney and bladder complaints and is used both internally and as a rub and steam bath in the treatment of rheumatic affections. It is also very beneficial to the respiratory system and so is useful in treating diseases of the mucous membranes and respiratory complaints such as coughs, colds, influenza, and TB. Externally it is a very beneficial treatment for a variety of skin complaints, wounds, sores, burns, boils etc. and is used in the form of liniment plasters, poultices, herbal steam baths and inhalers.

(<http://naturalmedicinalherbs.net>)

**** CNT - Common Native Trees of Virginia, by Virginia Department of Forestry**

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