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America's Ancient, Historical Hickory Trees

By Pat Malcolm

In 1792, William Bartram reported in his book, *Travels*, the discovery of a native shagbark hickory nut that he called 'Juglans exaltata.' Today, shagbark hickory is called 'Carya ovata.' Bartram reported that this shagbark hickory grove was cultivated in groves by the Indians west of Augusta, Ga.

Bartram documented that he saw 100 bushels of shagbark hickory nuts that were stored at just a single Indian family home. The nuts were pounded into a mash, and then boiled in water, where a white, oily liquid separated called 'hickory milk.' The liquid was described to be as sweet and rich as a fresh cream and was an active ingredient used by the Indians in cooking corn bread and hominy grits.

There remains some question whether or not the Indians near Augusta on the Altamaha River hickory groves as described by Bartram were actually planted as orchard trees or just harvested at a naturally located site. Many such productive groves occur along tidal creeks in Coastal Georgia, a few are left intact by land developers for the recreational value of the trees and the food value of the nuts that are gathered at one such Episcopal camp near Brunswick, Ga. along a tidal basin aquifer 'Honeycreek,' a tributary of the Satilla River.

The hickory cream that was recovered by the Indians for cooking purposes was also described by Indians from the Algonquian tribe in Virginia who called this cream "pawcohiccora," thus the word 'hickory' was adapted, modified, and abbreviated by the English colonists.

The shelled nuts of hickory are greatly sought after and appreciated for the unique flavor, not only by birds and animals, but by cooks and gourmet nut fanciers as well. The shagbark hickory nut, when added to chocolate fudge, leaves a pleasurable, indelible memory to all who are lucky enough to have experienced this delicious encounter.

A group of entrepreneurs out West offer shagbark syrup made from a top secret recipe that is made from a white inner bark extract of the juice obtained in the spring from shagbark hickory trees. The extract is obtained by pressure cooking and straining the juices from the pulverized and shredded bark. The demand is so great for this bottled hickory flavoring, that it has never satisfied the market to chefs throughout the United States. Julia Child reports that one of her favorite gourmet preparations includes

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mixing the bark extract with bourbon as a marinade for ribs.

Every backyard chef with a grill appreciates the fine flavoring that hickory tree wood smoke transfers into meat, fish, and many other food items. Early colonists used hickory tree wood smoke to flavor, cure, and preserve meats in the famous smokehouses of Virginia.

In the natural state of hardwood forests, hickory trees have hybridized easily and readily within species to produce numerous variations and combinations of characteristics that possess the traditional vigor displayed in scientific intercrosses of species by academic professionals.

The difficulties that have delayed commercial orchard development basically lies in the extreme difficulty in successfully grafting 130 cultivar selections for nursery distributors.

Some hickory nuts have smooth, thin shells that can be easily cracked by squeezing two together in

the hand, but other hickory nut shells are so thick and hard that they must be cracked by several vigorous hits from a heavy hammer.

Since hickory nuts are difficult to shell out into large pieces, it is beneficial to soak the nuts in water overnight before cracking. The shelled nuts then should be dried and placed in a cool, dark location until they are to be used in recipes.

Even though some cultivars can produce kernels up to 47% by weight, most nuts only shell out about 30% kernel. There is a great variability in hickory flavor from one cultivar to the next, however, they all have a high unsaturated fat content with strong medical antioxidant properties that transmits that characteristic spicy, sweet, buttery taste from the kernels.

A mature shagbark hickory tree is unmistakable in its shaggy, unkempt trunk appearance and its bright green, shiny leaves constantly moving in the breeze at the globular treetop. Young trees have a shiny, smooth bark that only begin to shred hair-like at an age of about 25 years.

Shagbark hickory trees are easy to transplant until about 4–5 feet tall, when a long taproot begins to anchor the tree to the ground with very few lateral roots. Because of these sturdy, deep growing taproots, and dense wood, the trees are among the best lawn specimens to plant in hurricane locations, since they appear invulnerable to wind damage with very straight trunks.

Several observations have been made on natural state hybridization between shagbark hickory '*Carya ovata*,' and pecan trees, '*Carya illinoensis*.' The resulting nuts seem to have flavor and nut characteristics somewhere in between the two species and are being planted by nut hobbyists and some have found a place within some commercial pecan orchards to insure pollination of this genetic marvel named, '*Hican*.'

The many uses of shagbark hickory trees include fuel, wood, and furniture products and as a supplement to charcoal cooking as a smoking agent for taste and preservation of meats. Because of the dense wood, hickory is used in tool handles such as hammers and axes, as well as chairs, ladders,

golf clubs, baseball bats, and skis.

Patrick A. Malcolm, owner of TyTy Nursery, has an M.S. degree in Botany and has been a grower and distributor of hickory trees for over three decades.

<http://www.tytyga.com>

Ancient Tea Tree Teas are HOT!

By Tea Hub

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Although people in Yunnan have been drinking teas made of leaves of ancient tea trees for generations, it is not until recently that people from outside Yunnan become aware of this type of tea. Ancient tea trees are growing in remote tea mountains in Xi Shuang Ban Na, a beautiful autonomy state that is 450 km away from Kunming, the capital of Yunnan. Interests in ancient tea trees are growing rapidly globally.

Surrounded by wild orchids, leaves of ancient tea trees have developed long lasting orchid aroma. Have been growing in tea mountains for over thousand years, ancient tea trees have accumulated high concentration of minerals and nutrition. Their leaves have sharp(shaper than cultivated trees) sawtooth edge, thick blades and clear veins. Teas made of leaves of ancient tea trees have strong flavor and can last up to 20 infusions.

Our line of real ancient tea tree teas ranges from green, black to Pu-erh. Check them out at www.teahub.com.

www.teahub.com, your trusted source for high quality green, black, oolong and Pu-erh teas.



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