

Cherokee Ethnobiology

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OSAGE ORANGE

Cherokee Usage

Osage Orange wood is renowned for its use in crafting Cherokee bows. Characterized by hard, dense, and tight graining, it is not an easy wood to carve, but affords itself to strong, fast, and durable bows. Its difficult working characteristics may have limited its use in the past to only the most proficient bowyers due to the limitations of stone and early metal tools. However, today it is often considered the wood of choice for current Cherokee bow crafters. Additionally, darts for blow guns are also crafted from this wood due to its durability. Osage Orange roots were also used to make a yellow dye, and tannins from the bark of the tree were also used to tan leather.

Description

A small to medium sized tree that grows from 30 to 40' in height. Trunk diameters can attain 12-14" or more in width. The wood is generally a dark "orange" color, and the roots display bright colors of orange and yellow. Osage Orange has many sharp thorns up to an 1" in length covering its branches. The "fruit", which grow to grapefruit size and have somewhat of a citrus smell, are actually an aggregate of hundreds of smaller fruits. Often considered poisonous, it is not; this reputation came from livestock physically choking on the fruit due to its large size. Squirrels relish the small seeds found inside the fruit. In the past, these trees were often planted as "living fences" due to dense growth and sharp thorns. Additionally, praised the fruit for supposed insecticidal qualities (facts still being researched).

Where found:

Osage orange trees can be found in stream bottom environments throughout the state.

Other names:

Bois d'arc, Bodark, Horse Apple, Hedge Apple, Cow Brain Tree.

Taxonomy:

Kingdom - Plantae
Phylum - Magnoliophyta
Class - Magnoliopsida
Order - Rosales
Family - Moraceae
Genus - *Maclura*
Species - *pomifera*

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