



Ulmus rubra

Names: Slippery Elm, Red Elm

Description: Slippery Elm is a medium sized tree with rough bark. Leaves are 4-6 inches long and doubly serrated, with an asymmetrical base and a rougher more sandpaper texture when compared with American elm. It is one of the first trees to flower in the early spring and its fruit is a papery samara.

Range and Habitat: Slippery elm is found in a variety of forest types throughout the eastern US, but is more common in the central, northern and western part of its range and prefers rich moist soils.



Uses: The inner bark of slippery elm is mucilaginous, meaning that it creates mucous and helps heal mucous membranes. This property makes it soothing to the throat and good for the stomach lining. Slippery Elm is most commonly used as a lozenge or tea for treating coughs, sore throats, stomachaches and constipation, but the bark is also powdered and made into poultices. Native Americans and early settlers used slippery elm topically to treat wounds. Before it was banned, pitchers of the early 20th century rubbed it on baseballs to make them harder to hit.

Price: Average in 2014: Dry \$2.77 Fresh \$1.08

Trade Volume: Slippery elm was not one of the more commonly bought items in our past surveys, but was bought in large amounts. Only 8 percent of dealers reported purchasing it, but it made up 25 percent of the total weight. In 2010 the American Herbal Products Association recorded over 300,000 pounds of slippery elm bark purchased by their members.

Trade Distribution

We didn't record enough different purchasers of slippery elm to produce a reliable and confidential distribution map for 2014, but we saw most of the slippery elm harvest coming from Kentucky, WV and Ohio. If this distribution is influenced by the plants range, we would expect to see more buyers and more product in the survey for 2015, since it includes larger portions of the Ohio River Valley and the Midwest.

Stewardship and cultivation

Slippery Elm is fairly abundant, but susceptible to Dutch Elm and a newer disease called Elm Phloem Necrosis. This and heavy and destructive harvesting in some areas have led to efforts to better conserve this useful and valuable tree. Bark is usually peeled in the late spring and early summer when the sap is flowing. The tree should never be felled or girdled. It is recommended that the bark be peeled off of the branches or on only on one side of the trunk so the bark can regenerate. Once harvested, most dealers prefer that it be rossed, that the inner bark be separated from the outer bark before drying.

Slippery Elm is rarely cultivated, but seeds can be gathered and germinated in flats. United Plant Savers recommends planting seeds in a mixture of sphagnum moss and sand and then transplanting seedlings to tree tubes in potting soil for a year before planting in their final locations

References:

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