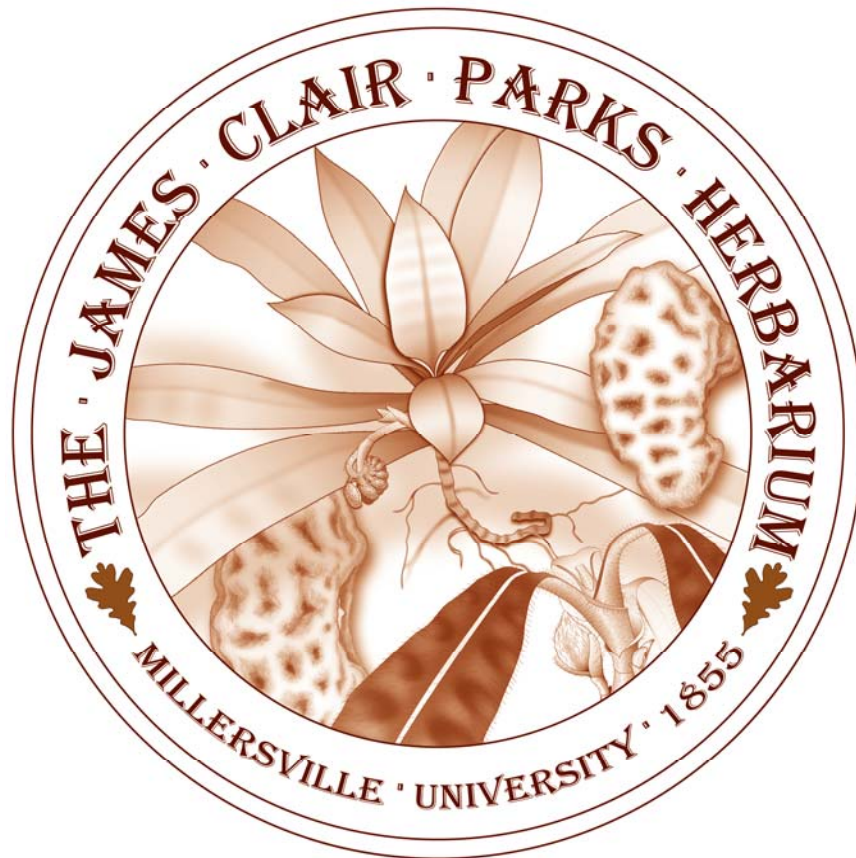


PARKSIA

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useful information regarding plants.

PARKSIA

Editor

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About Parksia

Parksia is published periodically by the James C. Parks Herbarium of The Department of Biology, Millersville University of Pennsylvania. It is dedicated to publishing short encyclopedic articles and essays containing useful information about plants in our world. *Parksia* is available for free, on the Web at <http://herbarium.millersville.edu>. The street mailing address for the Herbarium is James C. Parks Herbarium, Department of Biology, Millersville University of Pennsylvania, 288 Roddy Science Building, 50 E Frederick St, Millersville, Pennsylvania, 17551, United States of America.

Contributions

If you are interesting in contributing to *Parksia*, please send correspondence to the *Editor* at the address above.

HOW DID *THUJA OCCIDENTALIS* GET ITS COMMON NAME “ARBORVITAE”?

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Thuja occidentalis is a small evergreen, coniferous tree native to eastern North America. It is a member of the cedar and redwood family, Cupressaceae, and has scale-like leaves borne along flattened stems in pairs (Figure 1). The species is commonly known as the northern white-cedar and arborvitae. It is called a cedar by many because of its heartwood which, like other cedars, is aromatic and repels moths, other insects, and resists microbial decay. Thus, it can be used in cedar chests, although in its range the eastern red-cedar, *Juniperus virginiana*, is more often used as such. Its other name of arborvitae, which is Latin for “tree of life,” owes to its life-saving role during the French explorer Jacques Cartier’s second voyage in search of a west passage to the rich markets of China and East Asia up the St. Lawrence river in what is today Canada. The Cartier expedition’s navigation up the St. Lawrence was blocked by rapids near the Iroquois settlement of Hochelaga (today, Montreal, Quebec) in September 1535. Cartier retreated downriver to the Iroquois village of Stadacona (near present-day Quebec City) to overwinter from November 1535 to April 1536. The winter there was long, cold, and scurvy broke-out. Scurvy killed 25 of Cartier’s 110 men before they learned from the local Amerindians that a tea made from the bark (the inner bark, or phloem) and leaves of *Thuja occidentalis* (which we know today includes high levels of vitamin C) could be used to cure their scurvy. Cartier’s men used the tea and cured themselves. Cartier, of course, did not find the western passage to China, but upon his return to France, he shared his stories about this life-saving tree to the noble elite and botanical scholars, who appropriately named it the “arborvitae”.

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HARDY: ARBORVITAE



Figure 1. A twig of arborvitae, *Thuja occidentalis*. Photo ©2011 by Christopher R. Hardy (Photo should not to be used without the expressed, written consent of the copyright holder).

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