

Salix babylonica

Babylon willow

Weeping willow



Is a species of willow native to dry areas of northern China, but cultivated for millennia elsewhere in Asia, being traded along the Silk Road to southwest Asia and Europe.

Medicinal use of Weeping Willow:

The leaves and bark are antirheumatic, astringent and tonic.

A decoction of the leaves is used in the treatment of abscesses, carbuncle, fever, rheumatism, skin diseases, ulcers etc. An infusion of the bark has been used to treat diarrhoea and fevers. The bark can be used as a poultice. The stem bark is used in the treatment of skin eruptions

due to parasites. The root bark is used in a bath for the treatment of parasitic skin diseases. A gum from the stems is used in the treatment of foul sores. The down of the seeds is used in the treatment of fevers, haemorrhages, jaundice, rheumatism etc. The fresh bark of all members of this genus contains salicin, which probably decomposes into salicylic acid (closely related to aspirin) in the human body. This is used as an anodyne and febrifuge.

Edible parts of Weeping Willow:

Inner bark - raw or cooked. It can be dried, ground into a powder and then added to cereal flour for use in making bread etc. A very bitter flavour, it is a famine food that is only used when all else fails. Young shoots and flower buds - cooked. Not very palatable. Older leaves are used to adulterate tea. A source of a manna-like substance.

Other uses of the herb:

The stems are very flexible and are used in basket making.

The plant is usually coppiced annually when grown for basket making, though it is possible to coppice it every two years if thick poles are required as uprights. The extensive root system makes this species useful for binding soils. A decoction or infusion of the bark has been used as a wash to make the hair grow.

Propagation of Weeping Willow:

Seed - must be surface sown as soon as it is ripe in late spring. It has a very short viability, perhaps as little as a few

days. Cuttings of mature wood of the current year's growth, November to February in a sheltered outdoor bed or planted straight into their permanent position and given a good weed-suppressing mulch. Very easy. Plant into their permanent positions in the autumn. Cuttings of half-ripe wood, June to August in a frame. Very easy.

