

# [Facts Concerning the Butternut Tree of North-America] Dr. William James Almon

**Date:** Late 18th century; exact date unknown.

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Contributor Role

Compiler

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Publication Format

Print

Type

Medicine

Miscellaneous

Symptoms

dysentery

hemorrhoids

gonorrhea

Ingredients

butternut

butternut tree

butternut bark

butternut tree bark

water

jalap

rhubarb

Places

North America

Europe

London

Paris

Edinburgh

Halifax  
Nova Scotia

**Source:** Manuscript Notebook of Dr. William James Almon

**Institution:** Nova Scotia Archives | **Source Origin:** Almon Family Fonds | **Reference:** MG 1 / Microfilm Reel 10,045

## Description

An account of the medical usefulness of butternut tree bark in treating a variety of ailments. Unique to North American medical practice, the decocted buttermilk bark widely used in domestic medicine was also employed by civilian physicians and apothecaries as well as the continental army. The bark is known to be useful also for dying cloth. Newspaper clipping, p. 157.

"Facts Concerning the Butternut Tree of North America" from Dr. Mitchel's Journal appeared several times in American newspapers in 1788:

The Pennsylvania Packet, and Daily Advertiser, Philadelphia, 6 September 1788;

The New-Haven Gazette, and Connecticut Magazine, New Haven, 18 September 1788;

Thomas's Massachusetts Spy; or The Worcester Gazette, Worcester, 25 September 1788;

The New Hampshire Gazette, and the General Advertiser, Portsmouth, 2 October 1788;

City Gazette And Daily Advertiser, Charleston, 6 October 1788;

The United States Chronicle: Political, Commercial and Historical, Providence, 9 October 1788;

The Federal Gazette, and Philadelphia Post, Philadelphia, 11 October 1788;

The Weekly Monitor, Litchfield, 20 October 1788;

American Museum: Or Repository & Modern Fugitive Pieces Etc. Prose and Poetica, Vol. 4 ,Issue 5, 1 November 1788 (p. 435-36);

The Berkshire Chronicle, Pittsfield, 19 December 1788.

None of these appear to be the direct source for Dr. Almon's clipping, however (the typography of his clipping is different; perhaps there are printings not included in the America Historical Newspapers and American Antiquarian Society (AAS) Historical Periodicals Collection databases).

## Transcription

Facts concerning the Butternut Tree of North-Ame-  
rica.

From Doctor MITCHEL'S Journal.

THE Butternut tree grows luxuriantly in many places, and is sometimes so large as to measure ten feet in circumference. It is a specie of juglans, seemingly not noticed by Linnaeus, and although mentioned by Cutler (memoirs of the American Acadamy of arts and sciences, vol. I. p. 490) among the valuable indigenous vegetables of the United States, has been passed over without a narrative of its particular uses and virtues.

The bark affords, by boiling in water, an extract that is found, by experience, to possess a purgative quality. This is safe, gentle and efficacious; and when administered in doses, from 15 to 40 grains, operates downwards without griping. It was much used in the continental army, during the late war, and proved a good substitute for jalap, rhubarb, and other cathartics of foreign production. The country people, in several districts, keep it for their families and prescribe it as a domestick medicine; Some of them have even been profitable busied in preparing the extract for sale, to practitioners of physick, apothecaries and house-keepers, both in this country and abroad.

It is an excellent medicine in those diseases where gentle purges and mild cathartics are proper, and therefore it is said to have been remarkably serviceable in dysenteries, haemorrhoids, gonorrhoeas and other ailments.

This remedy seems peculiar to North-America; it appears not to be employed in medical practice in Europe; and I never knew it prescribed in the infirmaries at London, Paris or Edinburgh; nor has it been received into any of the pharmacopeias. No mention is made of it even by the laborious Triller, who writes indeed concerning the *Nuces Juglandes*, but seems so unacquainted with the properties of this tree, that he has entirely omitted it (*Dispensator. Pharmaceut. tom. I. p. 197. 4 to Francofurti ad Moenum, 1763*)--Nor is any thing said about it by Lewis. (*Experimental history of the Materia Medica.*) But it certainly claims highly the attention of the European physicians, and if procured and administered, there is no doubt that it would be ever after considered by them, a choice article of *Materia Medica*.

Besides its use in private practice, it is excellently adapted, from its cheapness, to the purposes of hospitals, dispensaries, navies and camps. If then physicians and surgeons, in foreign countries, can be encouraged to prescribe this extract to their patients, they will not only bring into vogue an useful medi-

cine, but will likewise make it a lucrative article of commerce, for exportation from this quarter of the globe.

It needs scarcely to be mentioned, that the nut of this tree is very rich, esculent and oily; and that the bark is used for dying cloth with various shades of brown.

Facts Concerning the Butternut Tree of North-America recipe from Early Modern Maritime Recipes:  
<https://emmr.lib.unb.ca/recipes/244>