

TREMBLING ASPEN – *Populus tremuloides*

If you walked from Mexico to the Beaufort Sea, chances are you'd spot a trembling aspen along most of your journey. What makes this tree so wide-ranging is its adaptability.

One of the aspen's handiest adaptations is its ability to reproduce without putting a lot of energy into making seeds. They do this by growing a spreading mat of roots that send up lots of stems or "suckers". With good sunlight, a few trees can grow enough suckers to populate an area the size of a football field. The resulting stand is not really a group of individual trees but a colony of clones, all exact genetic replicas of each other.

HUMAN USES

Traditional

- Tea from inner bark treats coughs
- White powder from bark stops bleeding
- Chewed leaves draw sting out of insect bites
- Wood carved into canoe paddles; large knots into bowls
- Ash from green wood mixed with caribou fat to make lye soap
- Inner bark eaten as survival food (tastes like honeydew)

Commercial

- Wood ignored by forestry industry until recently
- Now used to make pulp, fibreboard, and chopsticks

WILDLIFE USES

- Preferred food for beavers
- Common browse for moose and snowshoe hare

FIELD NOTES

- Springs up quickly after fire
- Without fire, crowded out by more shade-tolerant conifers
- Maze-like patterns on leaves from insect pest, the aspen serpentine leafminer

- Green chlorophyll in bark allows photosynthesis before leaves
- Cankers form dark, open wounds on trunks weakening or killing tree

FROM A DISTANCE

- Small to medium deciduous tree up to 20 m high
- Spreading branches form a rounded crown
- Trunk relatively bare due to self-pruning twigs which drop in the fall

UP CLOSE

Leaves

- Oval shaped, square at base with pointed tip
- Edges finely round-toothed
- Leaves appear to "tremble" in the slightest breeze due to flattened leaf stalk
- Turn bright yellow-orange, gold, or reddish after the first frost

Catkins

- Drooping catkins appear before leaves
- Produce small silk-tufted seeds carried on the wind for up to 30 km

Bark

- On young trees, smooth, greenish-white with a waxy appearance
- Becomes rough and furrowed with age

