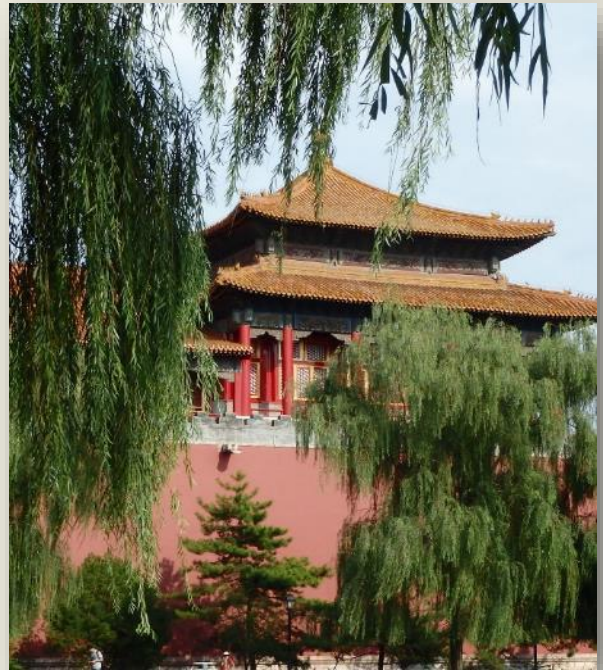


Weeping Willow

Salix 垂柳

babylonica



Weeping Willows are iconic trees throughout much of the world, not least in England and Australia. Willows are equally familiar to cricket followers – hence the idiomatic phrase *crack of leather on willow* – as they are to collectors of English ceramics. The Willow Pattern (Willow Ware)

became popular towards the end of the 1700s, copying the classic blue and white hand painted ceramics imported from China at the time of the Qing Dynasty.



The origins of these willow images are certainly Chinese. The Weeping Willow, *Salix babylonica*, has its origins in northern and eastern China and Korea but for millennia has been grown throughout Asia and was traded along the Silk Road through Central and Western Asia to eventually reach Europe, introduced into England from Aleppo in Syria in 1730. It was inappropriately named *Salix babylonica* by Linnaeus who mistakenly thought it was a tree referred to in Psalm 137 in the Bible: *By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept*



Blue and White plate with Staffordshire Willow Pattern. Photograph: James Yolkowski





Filipendula ulmaria (syn. *Spiraea ulmaria*) Photograph: H. Zell, CC BY-SA 3.0

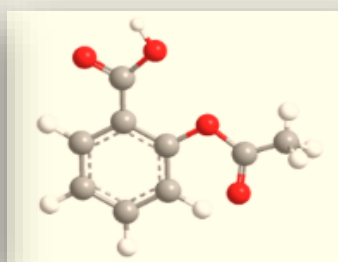
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when we remembered Zion; We hanged our harps upon the Willow in the midst thereof.' But the weeping trees that grew along the Euphrates River were *weeping poplars* (*Populus euphratica*) not willows.

There are more than 500 species of *Salix*, most grow in temperate and sub-arctic regions of the Northern Hemisphere and of these, 375 species occur in Asia. *Salix babylonica* has been in cultivation in China since at least the middle of the 3rd century BC. These days, it is widely used as an ornamental tree, for erosion control, basket weaving, timber and reforestation.

However, there is an active ingredient in willow bark and twigs that brought *Salix* species to the attention of modern science in the 19th Century. Going back 3,500 years, willow was used as an analgesic by Egyptians and Sumerians and in ancient Greece it was recommended by Hippocrates. In Roman times, it appears in the writings of Pliny the Elder. In 1828, German pharmacologist Johann Buchner refined *Salicin* (from *Salix*) from willow bark but it was not until 1897, a German chemist, *Felix Hoffman*, synthesized *aspirin*, now used to treat a wide range of medical conditions. Not content to synthesize one of the most *beneficial* drugs of all time, within two weeks he had also synthesized *heroin*, one of the most *devastating*.

In 1838, about 60 years earlier, Italian chemist, *Raffaele Piria*, had produced salicylic acid from another plant, Meadowsweet, *Filipendula ulmaria*, and it was Meadowsweet, rather than *Salix*, that the chemical firm Bayer used to synthesize *acetylsalicylic acid* – aspirin. The name *aspirin* comes from the A from *acetyl* and *spir* from *Spiraea ulmaria*, an older botanical name for Meadowsweet.



And back on cricket, we would love to be able to tell you that cricket bats are made from Weeping Willow (*Salix babylonica*), but their origins are not Chinese. Rather, they are made from *Salix alba* var. *caerulea*, English Cricket Bat Willow, which is native to western and central Asia and Europe. The wood is tough, shock resistant and lightweight-



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