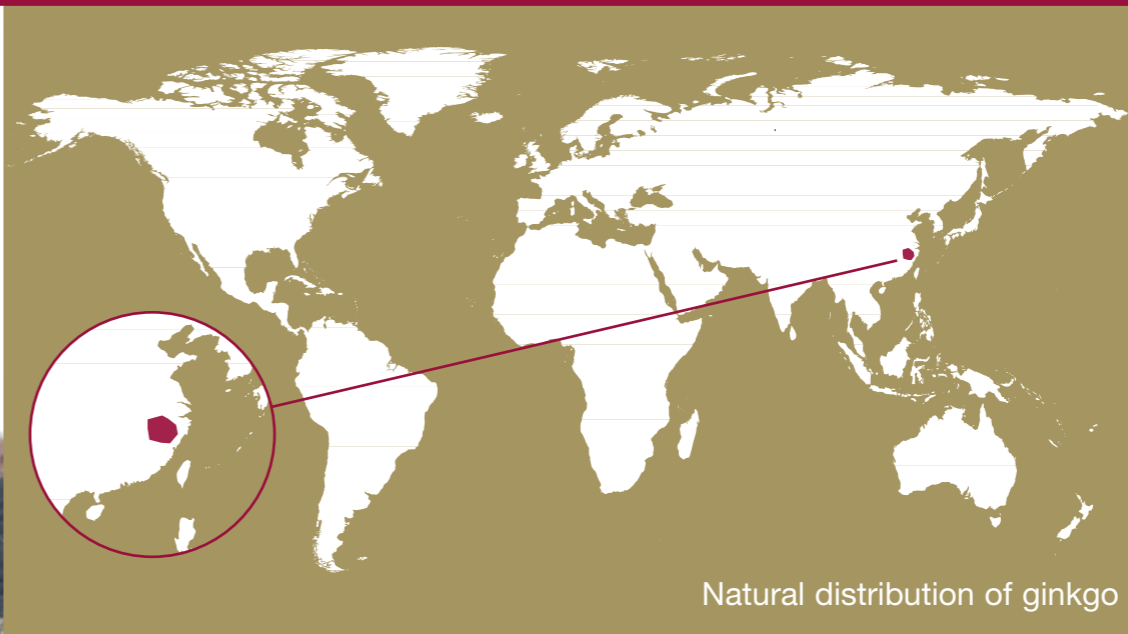


Ginkgo *Ginkgo biloba*

Fossilized ginkgo leaves show that this tree has not changed much over millions of years.



Natural distribution of ginkgo



illustration by John White

The ginkgo's deciduous leaves have a unique shape and vein pattern. The ancient Chinese called it the 'duck's foot tree'.

This tree is a survivor.

Ginkgos have existed virtually unchanged for over 250 million years. Experts think they were the very first type of tree to evolve, even before the dinosaurs. Once there were many types of ginkgo but today only this species clings doggedly on. The tree is now thought to be nearly extinct in the wild apart from a tiny population in China.

Nevertheless, the ginkgo's links to humans mean that it has been widely cultivated for thousands of years. Today you are most likely to see them as street trees, thriving in conditions far too polluted for other species. Their leaves also contain compounds that are used to treat a range of medical conditions by increasing the blood flow. Today ginkgo extracts are worth millions of pounds every year.

Did you know?

Four ginkgo trees survived the Hiroshima atom bomb explosion in 1945 and are still alive today.