



Calocedrus decurrens California Incense-Cedar¹

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INTRODUCTION

This stately native evergreen tree slowly grows straight up in a very narrow cone or columnar shape to a height of 70 to 100 feet or more in the wild, 40 to 60 feet in landscapes, yet is only 8 to 12 feet wide at maturity (Fig. 1). The branches, which are densely clothed with flat, shiny, dark green, aromatic needles, extend to the ground and remain on the tree unless shaded-out by other trees, making California Incense-Cedar ideal for use as a screen, hedge, or windbreak. Small, one-inch-long cones are produced at branch tips and are quite persistent, the seeds providing a welcome treat for many varieties of birds and wildlife. Although growth is slow, California Incense-Cedar trees are extremely long-lived, surviving 500 to 1000 years in the wild. Mature specimens have attractive, brick red, flaky, furrowed bark.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Calocedrus decurrens*

Pronunciation: kal-oh-SEE-drus deck-ER-renz

Common name(s): California Incense-Cedar

Family: *Cupressaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 5 through 8 (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: hedge; screen; specimen

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

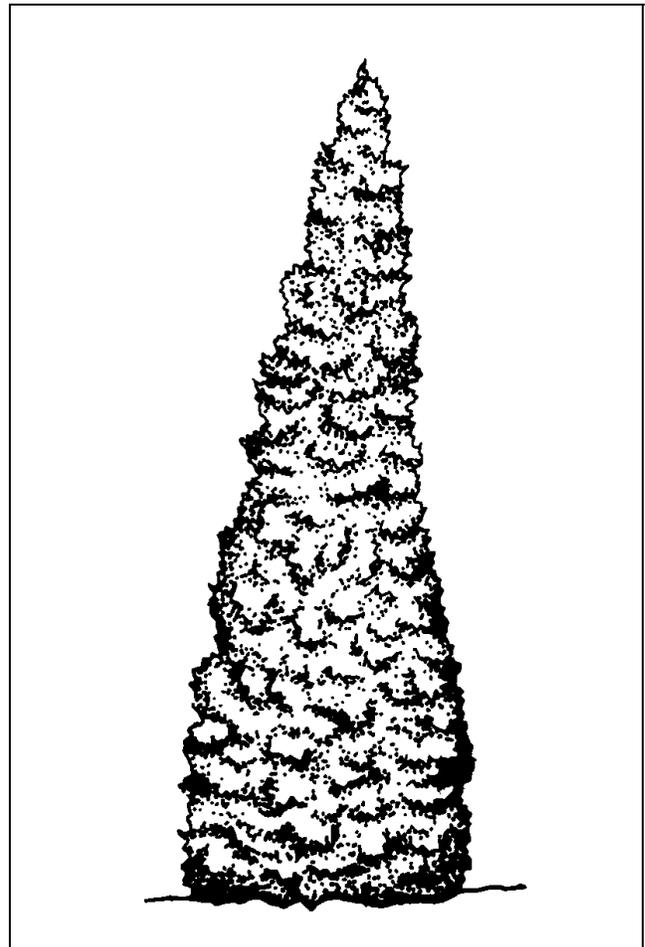


Figure 1. Middle-aged California Incense-Cedar.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 40 to 60 feet

Spread: 8 to 12 feet

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

Crown shape: columnar; pyramidal

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: slow

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: scale-like

Leaf venation: none, or difficult to see

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen; fragrant

Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated; oval

Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: grow mostly upright and will not droop; should be grown with a single leader; very showy trunk; no thorns

Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown; green

Current year twig thickness: thin

Wood specific gravity: 0.37

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun;
tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline;
acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental
features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: not known to be
susceptible

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not
affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT

California Incense-Cedar is a bit particular as to its growing requirements, being very sensitive to continually wet conditions. But with the right combination of proper humidity and moist soil, California Incense-Cedar will be quite happy growing in full sun or partial shade with some protection from harsh winds. It is surprisingly tolerant of heat and drought. Pruning is rarely necessary but trees may be sheared, if desired, to maintain a shorter, denser screen. Beautiful specimens of this tree can be seen growing in USDA hardiness zones six and 7.

Many plants grown seem to be the cultivar 'Columnaris', having a very formal landscape effect. The cultivar 'Compacta' has a dwarf, compact growth habit; 'Aureovariegata' has interspersed sprays of bright yellow foliage.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings (with great difficulty) or grafted onto *Thuja occidentalis*.

Pests

No pests are of major concern.

Diseases

A serious problem is heart rot, less serious problems are rust and leafy mistletoe.