

Plant Profiles: HORT 2242 Landscape Plants II

Botanical Name: *Taxodium distichum*

Common Name: baldcypress bald-cypress

Family Name: Cupressaceae - cypress family

General Description: *Taxodium distichum* is a large, stately deciduous conifer. It has a broad native range throughout parts of the Midwest and eastern United States. Its primary habitat is in swampy southern coastal areas where it forms large colonies dripping in Spanish moss. It is also native in the southern tip of Illinois where it grows along streams. The Illinois state champion baldcypress is located in the Cache River Basin along with some of the oldest species of this tree which are estimated to be 800 to 1000 years old. As a landscape plant, however, it has proven hardy as far north as Minnesota and southern Canada. It is planted in the Chicago area on large scale sites such as parks and arboreta but can be occasionally found in parkways and landscapes. In cultivation baldcypress grows equally well in wet or slightly dry soils provided the soils are not alkaline. In a high pH soil this tree may become chlorotic. There are many interesting cultivars mostly selected for variety in habit.

Zone: 4-11

Resources Consulted:

Brand, Mark. "Taxodium distichum:Common Baldcypress." *U Conn Plant Database of Trees, Shrubs and Vines*. U of Connecticut, 2001. Web. 14 Feb. 2014.

Davis, Becke. "ILCA Presents-Deciduous Conifers: In a Class by Themselves." *Landscape Contractor* June 2003: 29-36. Print.

Dirr, Michael A. *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants: Their Identification, Ornamental Characteristics, Culture, Propagation and Uses*. Champaign: Stipes, 2009. Print.

"The PLANTS Database." *USDA, NRCS*. National Plant Data Team, Greensboro, NC 27401-4901 USA, 2014. Web. 14 Feb. 2014.

Creator: Julia Fitzpatrick-Cooper, Professor, College of DuPage

Creation Date: 2014

Keywords/Tags: Pinaceae, tree, conifer, cone, needle, deciduous conifer, *Taxodium distichum*, baldcypress



Whole plant/Habit:

- Description: *Taxodium distichum* is a large pyramidal to conical shaped tree. Its fine-textured needle-like summer foliage creates a soft appearance.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: September 23, 2008
- Image File Name: bald_cypress_1040725.png



Whole plant/Habit:

- Description: The pyramidal to conical habit is most apparent in the dormant season. It can look very similar to Metasequoia. However, baldcypress seems to have a more rounded top, dawn redwood comes more to a point. Slight difference but apparent with practice.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: April 16, 2009
- Image File Name: bald_cypress_1120968.png



Bark:

- Description: The bark is an attractive reddish-brown. Often referred to as fibrous, it looks like it has been shredded.
- Image Source: Robert Videki, Doronicum Kft., Bugwood.org
- Image Date: Unknown
- Image File Name: 5397295-LGPT.jpg



Bark:

- Description: With age the bark turns gray and the trunk becomes buttressed (fluted and flared).
- Image Source: Richard Webb, Self-employed horticulturist, Bugwood.org
- Image Date: Unknown
- Image File Name: 1480745-SMPT.jpg



Bark:

- Description: Eventually, the buttressed base becomes massive and the tree develops “knees”. This is especially true in a wet habitat; less likely to form massive base and knees under normal landscape conditions.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: April 16, 2009
- Image File Name: bald_cypress_1120966.png



Bark:

- Description: According to the USDA, baldcypress has a taproot with horizontal roots that lie just under the surface and spread for 20-50 feet before bending down. The “knees”, which are outgrowths of the lateral root system, are thought to provide support for the tree.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: April 9, 2012
- Image File Name: bald_cypress_3773.png



Branch/Twig:

- Description: Similar to *Metasequoia*, *Taxodium* has two types of branches; persistent woody branches and deciduous branchlets. The persistent woody branches with the alternate/spiral leaf arrangement is a useful identification feature and helps to separate this species from dawn redwood which is opposite.
- Note: The long drooping structures in this image are male pollen cones, not stem structure.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: date
- Image File Name: bald_cypress_1230511.png



Bud:

- Description: Buds form on the persistent woody stems in an alternate/spiral arrangement. They are small and slightly rounded. The lateral buds produce the deciduous branchlets which do not produce any buds. The bud *arrangement* is a more important identification feature than the buds themselves.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: April 12, 2009
- Image File Name: bald_cypress_1120780.png



Flower:

- Description: *Taxodium* is a cone-bearing plant that does not produce true flowers or fruits although they are often loosely referred to as such. It is monoecious, meaning it produces male pollen cones and female cones on the same tree. On baldcypress the male pollen cones hang in long panicles.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: January 6, 2007
- Image File Name: bald_cypress_shawnee_1020188.png



Cone:

- Description: The female cones are globose and are green when immature.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: September 23, 2008
- Image File Name: bald_cypress_1040722.png



Cone:

- Description: The cones turn light brown or tan when mature.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: November 21, 2008
- Image File Name: bald_cypress_1080569.png



Cone:

- Description: The cones mature in one season and shatter easily.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: April 12, 2009
- Image File Name: bald_cypress_1120815.png



Leaf/Leaf Attachment:

- Description: The leaves of *Taxodium* are bright green when they emerge, fading to a soft, sage green in summer. This species is usually late to leaf out in spring.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: May 17, 2009
- Image File Name: bald_cypress_0610.png



Leaf/Leaf Attachment:

- Description: The leaves are linear, flat and needle-like but look like a ferny, compound leaf due to the two-ranked arrangement on the branchlets. The entire branchlet is deciduous in autumn.
- Image Source: David Stephens, Bugwood.org
- Image Date: Unknown
- Image File Name: 5499586-LGPT.jpg



Leaf/Leaf Attachment:

- Description: Fall color is a beautiful orange-brown turning russet red before abscising in late fall.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: October 31, 2008
- Image File Name: bald_cypress_1070722.png



Winter interest:

- Description: The distinctive habit and branching pattern creates an interesting texture in the dormant season.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: November 21, 2008
- Image File Name: bald_cypress_1080555.png

**Special ID feature(s):**

- Description: The habit, alternate-spiral arrangement of the needle-like deciduous foliage, and fall color will be the best identification features to use.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: November 21, 2008
- Image File Name: bald_cypress_1080535.png