



Meet the Incense Cedar Tree

by Cathy Ronk, UC Master Gardener

Name:

The Incense Cedar tree is a large, majestic, pyramidal shaped tree with aromatic leaves and exfoliating cinnamon colored bark. *Calocedrus decurrens* is native to the mountains of Oregon, California, west-central Nevada, and northern Baja California. It is adaptable to heat, drought, and poor soils.

Interesting Facts:

- Christmas tree farms have grown and sold Incense Cedar trees to the public.
- The durability and resistance to decay of Incense Cedar lumber makes it an excellent choice for exterior uses, such as: window sashes, siding, fencing, poles, trellises, and greenhouse benches.
- "Pencil Cedar" is another common name for this tree because its soft, easily whittled, straight grain wood is well-suited for the manufacture of pencils.
- The miniature, yellow-brown cones resemble ducks' bills when they open, and are borne at the tips of branches.
- Incense Cedar is long-lived. Some large trees are often more than 500 years old.
- In their native habitats, Incense Cedar is rarely found in pure stands, thus it occupies a subdominant crown position among giant sequoia, pacific madrone, several types of pine, oak, and fir.

Description:

Our Master Gardener tree list—entitled "Ornamental Trees for Home Gardeners and Landscapes," describes the Incense Cedar as a slow to moderate growing tree that can become 10-15 feet wide and 75-90 feet tall. It is an evergreen tree, meaning its leaves remain green all year long. The rich green, flat, scale-like leaves form pendulous branches that droop in sprays, and produces a pungent, pleasing fragrance. The trunk bark is reddish brown that becomes deeply furrowed with age.

Five different Incense Cedar cultivars are grown in Oregon production nurseries and made available to California nurseries. '**Compacta**' is a dwarf cultivar that eventually grows to 3 to 6 feet tall. '**Pioneer Sentry**' is a very narrow cultivar, 4 feet wide and 40 feet tall, that was found in a Portland, Oregon cemetery. '**Maupin Glow**' has bright golden leaves in the upper portion of the tree while the lower leaves are more greenish. This cultivar was found in Maupin, Oregon, on the east side of Mt. Hood. It matures to 5 feet wide and 8 to 15 feet tall. '**Berrima Gold**' is another cultivar with gold foliage and some summer light green undertones. Winter causes some



orange leaf hues to emerge. This cultivar was found in Australia; it reaches 6 to 8 feet wide and 30 feet tall. 'Aureovariegata' has bright golden foliage well scattered throughout its canopy in which warmer climates can enhance the variegations. This cultivar grows to 6 to 10 feet wide and 35 to 50 feet tall.

Care:

Plant these trees in fall through spring in full sun or light shade. Incense Cedar tolerates poor soil, summer heat—adapting easily in many Western climates. Be sure to provide them with plenty of space to grow naturally. Pruning and fertilizer is usually not necessary. Supplemental water is needed in our valley.

The Water Use Classification of Landscape Species (WUCOLS IV) rates Incense Cedar as a "moderate water use" native tree. The WUCOLS project was initiated and funded by the Water Use Efficiency Office of the California Department of Water Resources (DWR). Work was directed by the University of California Cooperative Extension. WUCOLS IV provides evaluations of the irrigation needs of over 3,500 plant groups used in California landscapes at www.ucanr.edu/sites/WUCOLS.

Root disease kills more incense cedar trees than any other pathogen. Avoid overwatering and overhead watering to help prevent these diseases. Environmental stress such as wind or drought can weaken trees to the point they can no longer resist insect infestations. The beetles and borers that invade incense cedar are not considered tree-killers, typically the environmental stress was the underlying problem.



Design Tips:

Incense Cedar is a good substitute for Coastal Redwood. Both tall trees have a desirable pyramidal shape, but Incense Cedar requires less water and less humidity.

The aromatic foliage of Incense Cedar is excellent for floral arrangements, Christmas wreaths, garlands, and bougths. It lasts longer than fir or pine cuttings.

Common shrub species growing with Incense Cedar in native habitats are: greenleaf manzanita, ceanothus, barberry, and coffeeberry.

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