**Calocedrus decurrens**

**California Incense-Cedar**

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

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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:** \textit{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

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**DESCRIPTION**

**Height:** 40 to 60 feet

**Spread:** 8 to 12 feet

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2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.
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.