Chamaecyparis lawsoniana
Lawson Falsecypress¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

Often seen at 40 to 60 feet tall by 15 feet wide in its cultivated form, this North American native can soar to heights of 100 to 150 feet in the wild (Fig. 1). The massive, thick trunk and formal, upright, conical silhouette is softened by the gently weeping tips of the short, upright branches. The flattened, dark blue-green branchlets have a delicate, almost fern-like appearance, which are nicely complemented by the rough, deeply furrowed, reddish-brown bark. Available in a wide variety of forms and bluish foliage colors, Lawson Falsecypress still remains today an important timber trees from the Pacific Northwest. But it is rare in the nursery trade and probably not well adapted to most landscapes.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Chamaecyparis lawsoniana
Pronunciation: kam-eh-SIP-uh-rihs
law-so-nee-AH-nuh
Common name(s): Lawson Falsecypress, Port-Orford-Cedar
Family: Cupressaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 5B through 7 (Fig. 2)
Origin: native to North America
Uses: Bonsai; screen; specimen
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

DESCRIPTION

Height: 40 to 60 feet
Spread: 15 to 25 feet

Figure 1. Mature Lawson Falsecypress.

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Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms
Crown shape: columnar; pyramidal; upright
Crown density: dense
Growth rate: medium
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
Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches
Leaf color: blue or blue-green; green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower
Flower color: blue; red
Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy

Fruit
Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: < .5 inch
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

Trunk and Branches
Trunk/bark/branches: grow mostly upright and will not droop; showy trunk; should be grown with a single leader; 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:** 0.43

**Culture**

**Light requirement:** tree grows in full sun  
**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained  
**Drought tolerance:** moderate  
**Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate  
**Soil salt tolerance:** moderate

**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**

Lawson Falsecypress is only suited for the largest landscapes such as in parks, golf courses, large industrial or commercial landscapes or estates. The unusually blue foliage and dense, symmetrical growth habit make it ideally suited as a screen in a sunny spot protected from constant wind. It has somewhat picky cultural requirements and should be grown in full sun in moist, well-drained soil (not clay), in areas of moderate to high humidity, and preferably where the trees can be protected from harsh winds. These sites may be hard to find in the East.

Various cultivars are available with different foliage colors (golden, blue, or silver-variegated) and different growth forms (dwarf, columnar, and low-spreading).

Propagation is done easily by cuttings taken in fall, or by seeds, with difficulty.

**Pests**

No pests are of major concern.

**Diseases**

A fungus damages this species by causing root-rot which eventually kills the tree. Plant only in the most well-drained soil.

There is also a branch canker which can cause branch dieback.