INTRODUCTION

The tree keeps a billowy pyramidal form on one central trunk until close to maturity when the crown opens up into an irregular, narrow oval (Fig. 1). It will reach a height of about 50 feet and spread about 20 feet. Old specimens can develop trunks to three feet in diameter. The reddish brown bark is ornamental, peeling off in long strips, and is the most pronounced characteristic on old trees. The foliage will become bronzed during the winter but greens up again in spring. Branches usually persist on the tree with old specimens branched to the ground.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Cryptomeria japonica
Pronunciation: krip-toe-MEER-ee-uh
juh-PAWN-ih-kuh
Common name(s): Japanese-Cedar
Family: Taxodiaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 6 through 8 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: Bonsai; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; screen; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); specimen; residential street tree; tree has been successfully grown in urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil, and/or drought are common

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range.

Figure 1. Middle-aged Japanese-Cedar.
Cryptomeria japonica -- Japanese-Cedar

**DESCRIPTION**

**Height:** 40 to 60 feet  
**Spread:** 15 to 20 feet  
**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms  
**Crown shape:** oval; pyramidal  
**Crown density:** dense  
**Growth rate:** slow  
**Texture:** fine

**Foliage**

**Leaf arrangement:** spiral (Fig. 3)  
**Leaf type:** simple  
**Leaf margin:** entire  
**Leaf shape:** awl-like  
**Leaf venation:** none, or difficult to see  
**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen  
**Leaf blade length:** less than 2 inches  
**Leaf color:** green  
**Fall color:** copper  
**Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

**Flower characteristics:** inconspicuous and not showy

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** round  
**Fruit length:** .5 to 1 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:** droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; 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:** green  
**Current year twig thickness:** medium
Figure 3. Foliage of Japanese-Cedar.

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in full sun  
Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic;  
well-drained  
Drought 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: very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect tree health or aesthetics

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Provide an acid soil and protection from winter winds. Locate the tree so air circulation is good, particularly during summer to help prevent leaf blight. Best with afternoon shade in southern part of its range. A number of cultivars are available varying in growth habit and ability to hold green foliage color in the winter. Cryptomeria is tolerant of compacted soil and performs well in parking lots and other tough, urban sites with some irrigation in drought. It makes a wonderful accent, screen, or border tree for larger properties. It may grow too large for most residential landscapes. They can be planted as street trees 10 feet back from the street in residential areas to provide an elegant flavor to the neighborhood.

Propagation is by cuttings which root slowly or by seed which germinates slowly.

‘Yoshino’ holds green foliage color in the winter.  
‘Elegans’ grows to 15 feet tall.

Pests

Mites can infest the foliage.

Diseases

Leaf blight and leaf spot are two problems. Leaf blight often causes much of the interior foliage to brown, creating an unsightly specimen. Fungicide sprays help prevent the disease, as does placing the tree so it receives early morning sun to dry the foliage. Keep the foliage as dry as possible.