**Cupressus sempervirens**
**Italian Cypress**\(^1\)

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson\(^2\)

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**INTRODUCTION**

With its narrow columnar habit of growth, this evergreen forms tall, dark green columns 40 to 60 feet in height in the western United States but are often much shorter (Fig. 1). Trees are normally no more than three feet wide. The scale-like leaves lend a very fine texture to any setting. Planted three feet apart, they make a dense screen. Italian Cypress is often used for framing, as a strong accent around large buildings, or in the formal landscape but does not lend itself well to many home landscapes. It quickly grows much too tall for most residential landscapes, looking much like a green telephone pole.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

- **Scientific name:** *Cupressus sempervirens*
- **Pronunciation:** koo-PRESS-us sem-per-VYE-renz
- **Common name(s):** Italian Cypress
- **Family:** Cupressaceae
- **USDA hardiness zones:** 7B through 11 (Fig. 2)
- **Origin:** not native to North America
- **Uses:** screen
- **Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

**DESCRIPTION**

- **Height:** 40 to 60 feet
- **Spread:** 3 to 6 feet
- **Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms
- **Crown shape:** columnar
- **Crown density:** dense
- **Growth rate:** medium
- **Texture:** fine

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1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-225, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: November 1993.
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.
**Foliage**

- **Leaf arrangement:** whorled
- **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:** green
- **Fall color:** no fall color change
- **Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

- **Flower characteristics:** inconspicuous and not showy

**Fruit**

- **Fruit shape:** oval
- **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:** grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; 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; gray
- **Current year twig thickness:** thin

**Culture**

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

**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem  
**Winter interest:** no special winter interest  
**Outstanding tree:** not particularly outstanding  
**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**

Growing in full sun on various well-drained soils, Italian Cypress should be planted in a well-prepared site and watered periodically until well-established. Italian Cypress should not be pruned. It is very susceptible to mites and trees are often infested.

Many cultivars are available; ‘Glauca’ has blue-green foliage and tight columnar form; ‘Stricta’ is very popular; ‘Horizontalis’ has horizontally-spreading branches.

Propagation is by cuttings or layering.

**Pests**

Bagworms are occasionally a problem for Italian Cypress. Mites are often a problem.

**Diseases**

Root rot can be a problem for Italian Cypress in poorly-drained soil. Canker is a devastating disease that has killed many trees in California.