**Juniperus virginiana** ‘Elegantissima’
‘Elegantissima’ Eastern Redcedar

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

**INTRODUCTION**

This cultivar of Redcedar is an evergreen growing 20 feet tall in an oval form and spreading 8 to 15 feet when given a sunny location (Fig. 1). Foliage is tipped with yellow and develops a brownish tint in winter in the north. The fruit is a blue berry on female trees and is ornamental when produced in quantity. Birds devour the fruit and ‘plant’ it along farm fences and in old abandoned fields. Some botanists do not separate *Juniperus virginiana* from *Juniperus silicicola*.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

*Scientific name:* *Juniperus virginiana* ‘Elegantissima’

*Pronunciation:* joo-NIP-er-us ver-jin-ee-AY-nuh

*Common name(s):* ‘Elegantissima’ Eastern Redcedar

*Family:* Cupressaceae

*USDA hardiness zones:* 3 through 9 (Fig. 2)

*Origin:* native to North America

*Uses:* Bonsai; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; reclamation plant; screen; tree has been successfully grown in urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil, and/or drought are common

*Availability:* grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

**DESCRIPTION**

*Height:* 20 to 30 feet

*Spread:* 8 to 15 feet

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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; oval; pyramidal  
**Crown density:** moderate  
**Growth rate:** fast  
**Texture:** fine

**Foliage**

- **Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite; whorled (Fig. 3)  
- **Leaf type:** simple  
- **Leaf margin:** entire; terminal spine  
- **Leaf shape:** awl-like; scale-like  
- **Leaf venation:** none, or difficult to see  
- **Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen  
- **Leaf blade length:** less than 2 inches  
- **Leaf color:** variegated  
- **Fall color:** no fall color change  
- **Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

- **Flower color:** green; yellow  
- **Flower characteristics:** inconspicuous and not showy

**Fruit**

- **Fruit shape:** round  
- **Fruit length:** < .5 inch  
- **Fruit covering:** fleshy  
- **Fruit color:** blue; purple  
- **Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; showy

**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:** susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break  
- **Current year twig color:** brown; green
Current year twig thickness: thin
Wood specific gravity: 0.47

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; 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: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: not known to be susceptible
Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree

USE AND MANAGEMENT

The dense growth and attractive foliage make Eastern Redcedar a favorite for windbreaks, screens, and wildlife-cover for large-scale landscapes. Its high salt-tolerance makes it ideal for seaside locations. Redcedar can make a nice Christmas tree, and the fragrant wood is popular for repelling insects. Although not currently used as a street tree, its wood is strong, the foliage is clean, and the fruit is small making it a suitable candidate. With proper pruning to remove lower branches, it should adapt well to street-scenes. Some southern cities have planted the species successfully as a street tree.

Planted in full sun or partial shade, Eastern Redcedar will easily grow on a variety of soils, including clay, but will not do well on soils kept continually moist. Growth will be poor in landscapes which are over-irrigated. Plants are difficult to transplant due to a coarse root system, except when quite small. Water until well-established and then forget about the tree. It performs admirably with no care, even on alkaline soil and along the coast. Usually insects and diseases are not a problem if grown in the full sun. There may be local restrictions on planting this tree near apple orchards because it is the alternate host for cedar-apple rust.

Some nurseries carry a cultivar or two of Redcedar.

Other cultivars include: ‘Burkii’ - pyramidal, blue foliage, 15 to 25 feet tall; ‘Canaertii’ - compact, pyramidal, good fruit production, fairly common in Texas; ‘Hillspire’ - (cupressifolia) - good green color; ‘Filifera’ - pyramidal, branchlets divided, foliage gray green; ‘Glauca’ - Silver Redcedar - narrow, columnar, 15 to 20 feet tall, silvery blue foliage especially in spring; ‘Keterii’ is commonly available in the mid-west, is more open with spaces between branches at the top of the tree, pyramidal; ‘Manhattan Blue’ - compact, 20 feet tall, pyramidal, foliage bluish green; ‘Pendula’ - Weeping Redcedar - branchlets pendulous, to 40 feet tall; ‘Pyramidalis Dundee’ - pyramidal, purplish green in winter; ‘Skyrocket’ - silver-blue foliage, narrow columnar form.

Pests

Usually none are serious.
Bagworm caterpillars occasionally web foliage and debris together to make bags up to two inches long. The insects live in the bags and emerge to feed on the foliage. Use sprays of *Bacillus thuringiensis*. The insects can also be picked off the plants by hand.

Juniper scale causes yellowed needles, and infected branches fail to produce new growth. The scale is round and at first white, later turning gray or black.

The Juniper webworm webs twigs and needles together, causing them to brown and die. The larva is 1/2-inch-long and is brown with darker stripes. The larvae are often in the densest part of the plant and can go unnoticed.

Mites cause stippled and bronzed foliage.

**Diseases**

Twig blights cause death and browning of twigs tips. The diseases may progress down the stem killing the whole branch. Small lesions may be seen at the base of dead tissue. Prune out dead branch tips. Dieback from Kabatina blight appears in early spring, from Phomopsis in summer.

Three rust diseases seen most often are cedar-apple rust, hawthorn rust, and quince rust. The most common is cedar-apple rust. On Juniper the first two diseases form galls and orange jelly-like horns in spring. The horns are most likely to form following periods of rainy, warm weather. Spores formed in the horns infect the alternate host. The diseases are more serious on the alternate host than Juniper. There may be local restrictions on planting this tree near apple orchards because it is the alternate host for cedar-apple rust. A separation of a few hundred yards may help avoid the disease. Prune out the spore horns when seen in the spring. Do not plant near hawthorns, apples, or crabapples.

Junipers are not tolerant of ice coatings. Expect dieback when Junipers are covered with ice for several days. Removing the ice is impractical.