

# Cupressus sempervirens: Italian Cypress<sup>1</sup>

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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. Trees are normally no more than three feet wide. The scale-like leaves lend a very fine texture to any setting. Planted 3 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

**Invasive potential:** little invasive potential

**Uses:** screen

**Availability:** not native to North America

## Description

**Height:** 40 to 60 feet

**Spread:** 3 to 6 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical

**Crown shape:** columnar

**Crown density:** dense

**Growth rate:** moderate

**Texture:** fine



Figure 1. Middle-aged *Cupressus sempervirens*: Italian cypress  
Credits: Ed Gilman, UF/IFAS

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** whorled

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** scale-like

1. This document is ENH384, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date November 1993. Reviewed May 2014. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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**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 color change  
**Fall characteristic:** not showy



Figure 2. Range

## Flower

**Flower color:** unknown  
**Flower characteristics:** 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; not showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** branches don't droop; not showy; typically one trunk; thorns  
**Pruning requirement:** little required  
**Breakage:** resistant  
**Current year twig color:** brown, gray  
**Current year twig thickness:** thin  
**Wood specific gravity:** unknown

## Culture

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

## Other

**Roots:** not a problem  
**Winter interest:** no  
**Outstanding tree:** no  
**Ozone sensitivity:** unknown  
**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** resistant  
**Pest resistance:** sensitive to pests/diseases

## 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'—blue-green foliage and tight columnar form; 'Stricta'—very popular; 'Horizontalis'—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.