

Cupressus sempervirens: Italian Cypress¹

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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 (Figure 2)

Origin: native to southern Europe and western Asia

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: not assessed/
incomplete assessment

Uses: screen



Figure 1. Full Form—*Cupressus sempervirens*: Italian cypress

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Figure 2. Range

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

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: <2 inches

Leaf color: dark green

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: unknown

Flower characteristics: not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval

Fruit length: ½ 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



Figure 3. Leaf—*Cupressus sempervirens*: Italian cypress

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches don't droop; not showy; typically one trunk; no thorns

Bark: light brown to gray and smooth, becoming darker and flaky with age

Pruning requirement: little required

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown, gray

Current year twig thickness: thin

Wood specific gravity: unknown



Figure 4. Bark—*Cupressus sempervirens*: Italian cypress
Credits: Gitta Hasing

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.

Resources

Koeser, A. K., Hasing, G., Friedman, M. H., and Irving, R. B. 2015. Trees: North & Central Florida. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

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