

# *Taxodium distichum*: Baldcypress<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Narrowly to broadly pyramidal when young, baldcypress, the state tree of Louisiana, eventually develops into a broad-topped, spreading, open specimen when mature. Capable of reaching 100 to 150 feet in height, most landscape specimens are rarely seen in this open form because they are usually much younger and shorter. Trees grow at a moderately fast rate, reaching 40 to 50 feet in about 15 to 25 years. Although it is native to wetlands along running streams, growth is often faster on moist, well-drained soil. The green, needle-like leaves turn a brilliant coppery yellow in fall before dropping, but the bare branches and reddish gray, peeling bark provide much landscape interest during the winter. The trunk grows unusually thick toward the base, even on young trees. The small seeds are used by some birds and squirrels.



Figure 1. Full Form—*Taxodium distichum*: baldcypress

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## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Taxodium distichum*

**Pronunciation:** tack-SO-dee-um DISS-tick-um

**Common name(s):** Baldcypress

**Family:** Cupressaceae

**USDA hardiness zones:** 5A through 10B (Figure 2)

**Origin:** native to the southeastern United States, in addition to east Texas and Atlantic coastal states as far north as Delaware

**UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status:** Native

**Uses:** street without sidewalk; screen; specimen; reclamation; parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100–200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); tree lawn 4–6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; urban tolerant; highway median; shade; hedge

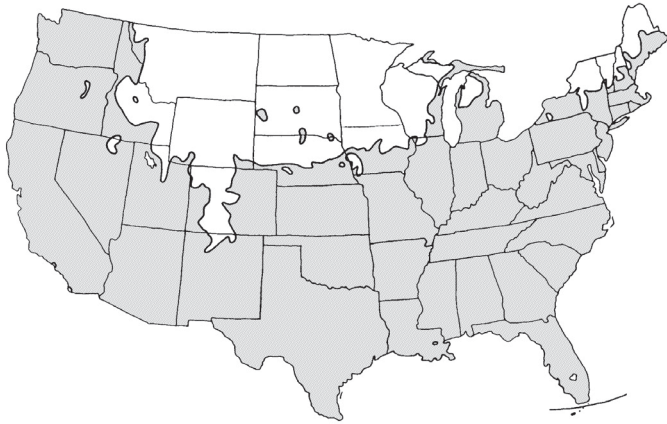


Figure 2. Range

## Description

**Height:** 60 to 80 feet

**Spread:** 25 to 35 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical

**Crown shape:** pyramidal, upright/erect

**Crown density:** dense

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** fine

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** linear, lanceolate

**Leaf venation:** none, or difficult to see

**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous

**Leaf blade length:** ½ - ¾ inch

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** yellow to copper

**Fall characteristic:** showy



Figure 3. Leaf—*Taxodium distichum*: baldcypress

## Flower

**Flower color:** brown

**Flower characteristics:** not showy



Figure 4. Flower—*Taxodium distichum*: baldcypress

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** round or ovulate, cone

**Fruit length:** ½ to 1 inch

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** green when young, then turns brown and hard with maturity



**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; not showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem; resinous



Figure 5. Cone—*Taxodium distichum*: baldcypress

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/branches:** branches droop; showy; typically one trunk; no thorns

**Bark:** gray and/or reddish brown, smooth, fibrous, with extremely shallow or completely lacking furrows, and with a buttressing base

**Pruning requirement:** little required

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** green

**Current year twig thickness:** thin

**Wood specific gravity:** 0.46



Figure 6. Knees—*Taxodium distichum*: baldcypress

## Culture

**Light requirement:** full sun to partial shade

**Soil tolerances:** sand; loam; clay; acidic; slightly alkaline; wet to well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate



Figure 7. Bark—*Taxodium distichum*: baldcypress

Credits: Gitta Hasing

## Other

**Roots:** not a problem

**Winter interest:** yes

**Outstanding tree:** yes

**Ozone sensitivity:** tolerant

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** resistant

**Pest resistance:** resistant to pests/diseases

## Use and Management

Although often seen at water's edge where it will develop "knees", or root projections, that will extend above the water, baldcypress can also be grown in dry locations and makes an attractive lawn, street, or shade tree. Cypress knees do not generally form on these drier sites. Cities from Charlotte, NC, Dallas, TX to Tampa, FL currently use it as a street tree and it should be used more extensively throughout its range in urban landscapes. It provides a good vertical accent to the landscape and should be used more often in urban areas. Baldcypress can be clipped into a formal hedge, creating a wonderful soft screen.

Surprisingly, the roots do not appear to lift sidewalks and curbs as readily as some other species. Its delicate, feathery foliage affords light, dappled shade, and the heartwood of baldcypress is quite resistant to rot. However, most lumber available at lumber yards today is sapwood and is not resistant to rot.

Baldcypress is ideal for wet locations, such as its native habitat of stream banks and mucky soils, but the trees will also grow remarkably well on almost any soil, including heavy, compacted, or poorly-drained muck, except alkaline soils with a pH above 7.5. Locate where the sun will strike the tree on all sides for best symmetrical development. Baldcypress is relatively maintenance-free, requiring pruning only to remove dead wood and unwanted lower branches which persist on the tree. It maintains a desirably straight trunk and a moderately dense canopy and does not form double or multiple leaders as do many other large trees.

The cultivar 'Monarch of Illinois' has a very wide-spreading form and 'Shawnee Brave' has a narrow, pyramidal form, 15 to 20 feet wide. 'Pendens' has drooping branchlets and large cones. *Taxodium ascendens* is native to wet, boggy areas with standing water, whereas *Taxodium distichum* is more common along streams.

Propagation is by seed.

## Pests

Bagworms can defoliate portions of the tree. Mites can be particularly troublesome in dry summers without irrigation, causing early leaf browning and defoliation in mid to late summer.

## Diseases

Twig blight is caused by a weak pathogen and is usually present on dead or dying tissue. When the tree is stressed the fungus can kill branch tips. Dead tips can be pruned off. Do not let dead or diseased branches remain on the tree. Keep trees healthy with regular fertilization.

## References

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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