



# *Calocedrus decurrens* California Incense-Cedar<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

This stately native evergreen tree slowly grows straight up in a very narrow cone or columnar shape to a height of 70 to 100 feet or more in the wild, 40 to 60 feet in landscapes, yet is only 8 to 12 feet wide at maturity (Fig. 1). The branches, which are densely clothed with flat, shiny, dark green, aromatic needles, extend to the ground and remain on the tree unless shaded-out by other trees, making California Incense-Cedar ideal for use as a screen, hedge, or windbreak. Small, one-inch-long cones are produced at branch tips and are quite persistent, the seeds providing a welcome treat for many varieties of birds and wildlife. Although growth is slow, California Incense-Cedar trees are extremely long-lived, surviving 500 to 1000 years in the wild. Mature specimens have attractive, brick red, flaky, furrowed bark.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Scientific name:** *Calocedrus decurrens*

**Pronunciation:** kal-oh-SEE-drus deck-ER-renz

**Common name(s):** California Incense-Cedar

**Family:** *Cupressaceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 5 through 8 (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** native to North America

**Uses:** hedge; screen; specimen

**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

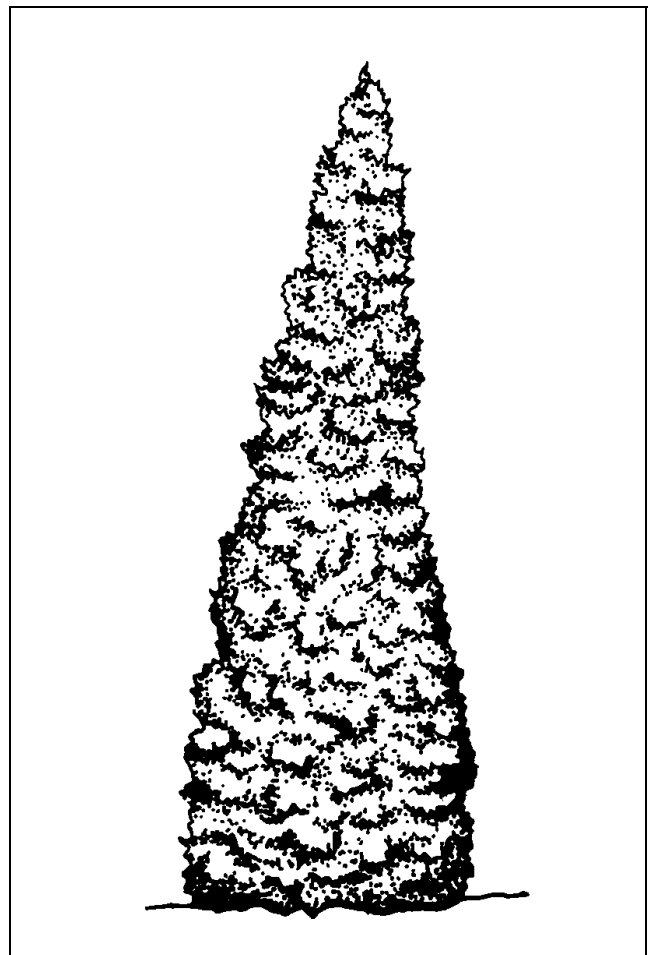


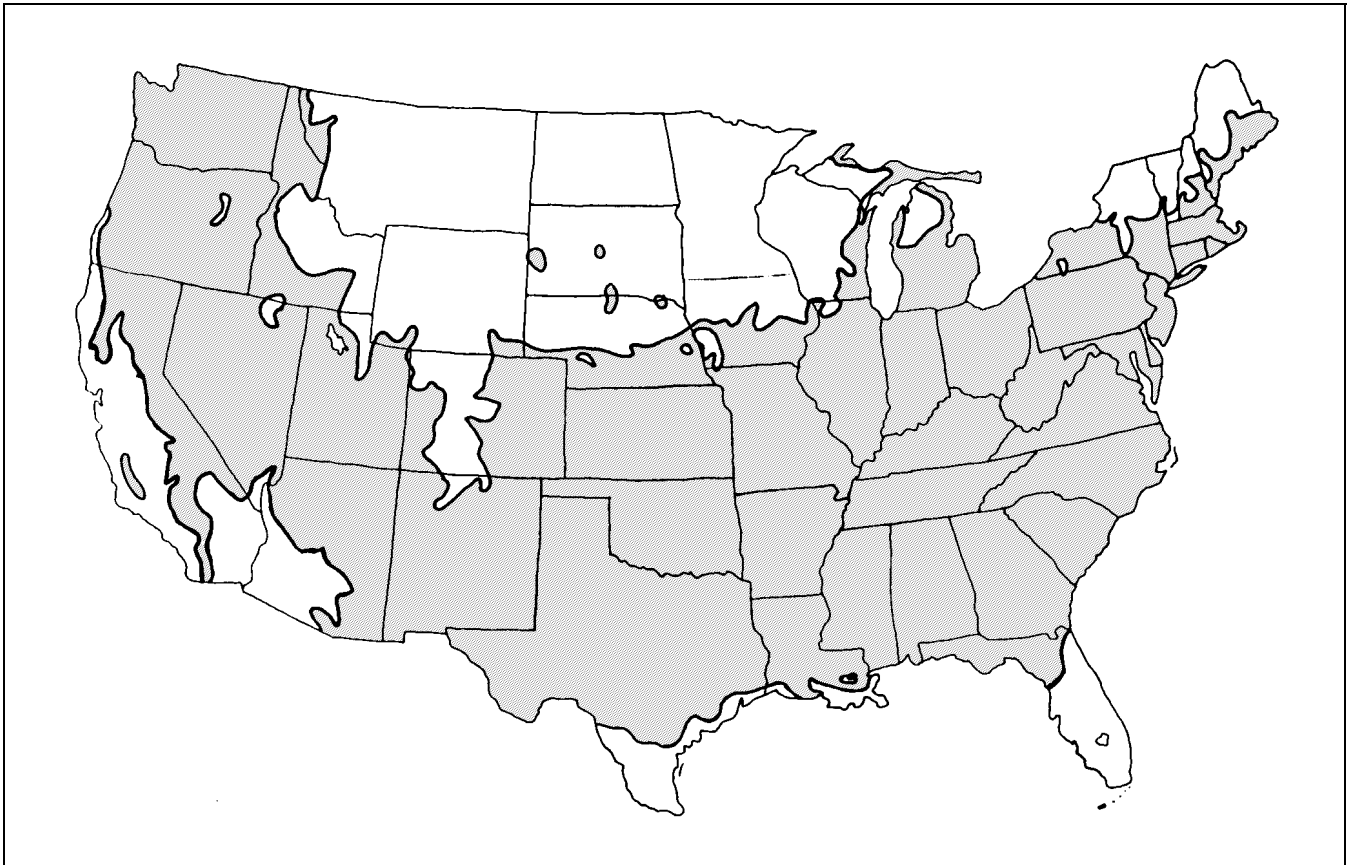
Figure 1. Middle-aged California Incense-Cedar.

## DESCRIPTION

**Height:** 40 to 60 feet

**Spread:** 8 to 12 feet

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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.



**Figure 2.** Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

**Crown shape:** columnar; pyramidal

**Crown density:** dense

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** fine

**Foliage**

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** scale-like

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

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen; fragrant

**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:** elongated; oval

**Fruit length:** .5 to 1 inch

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** brown

**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** grow mostly upright and will not droop; should be grown with a single leader; very showy trunk; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** brown; green

**Current year twig thickness:** thin

**Wood specific gravity:** 0.37

## Culture

**Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun;  
tree grows in full sun

**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline;  
acidic; 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:** tree has outstanding ornamental  
features and could be planted more

**Invasive potential:** little, if any, potential at this time

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** not known to be  
susceptible

**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not  
affected by pests

## USE AND MANAGEMENT

California Incense-Cedar is a bit particular as to its growing requirements, being very sensitive to continually wet conditions. But with the right combination of proper humidity and moist soil, California Incense-Cedar will be quite happy growing in full sun or partial shade with some protection from harsh winds. It is surprisingly tolerant of heat and drought. Pruning is rarely necessary but trees may be sheared, if desired, to maintain a shorter, denser screen. Beautiful specimens of this tree can be seen growing in USDA hardiness zones six and 7.

Many plants grown seem to be the cultivar 'Columnaris', having a very formal landscape effect. The cultivar 'Compacta' has a dwarf, compact growth habit; 'Aureovariegata' has interspersed sprays of bright yellow foliage.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings (with great difficulty) or grafted onto *Thuja occidentalis*.

## Pests

No pests are of major concern.

## Diseases

A serious problem is heart rot, less serious problems are rust and leafy mistletoe.