

## Bald Cypress

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### *Taxodium distichum*

- **Recommended Use:** Ornamental, wildlife habitat
- **Exposure:** Full sun to partial shade
- **Size:** Often 50 to 70 feet tall and 25 feet wide, but older specimens can be much taller.
- **Habit:** Upright pyramidal
- **Growth:** Moderate to fast
- **Maintenance Category:** Moderate maintenance
- **Water Use:** Average
- **Highlights:** Multifunctional, state tree of Louisiana, native, fall color, adapted to wet and dry conditions.



As the Louisiana state tree, bald cypress look picturesque in all four seasons.

### Summary

The bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) is the state tree of Louisiana, and these native trees can be observed growing throughout Louisiana and the entire southeastern United States. Bald cypress trees do well in moist, acidic soils and flooded areas; however, they are also adapted to dry soils, allowing bald cypress to thrive in almost any Louisiana environment. Bald cypress trees are adapted to very hot and humid environments, making them a perfect fit for Louisiana summers. The bald cypress is a deciduous conifer, which means it is one of the few cone-bearing plants that loses its needles in the fall. Trees will often grow up to 70 feet tall and as wide as 25 feet. Older specimens are capable of reaching upwards of 150 feet in height. Bald cypress is known for its attractive pyramidal shape, with lacy green needlelike leaves, which resemble feathers. Leaves from the bald cypress turn a wonderful rust to orange color in the fall prior to dropping, where they provide a fine-textured natural mulch and serve as protection for a host of wildlife. Bald cypress is also desirable for its ornamental bark, which has a shedding appearance in colors ranging from tan-gray to orange-red. A number of named varieties available on the market have columnar weeping or dwarf growth habits. Typically, when grown in wet conditions, bald cypress will form “cypress knees,” which provide additional aesthetics for water features. Because of the possibility of knees, careful consideration should be given when planting near mowed turf areas or concrete building foundations. However, knee formation is dependent on the cultivar or specimen. A host of aquatic-, avian- and ground-dwelling wildlife rely upon this tree for nesting, food and shelter throughout the year. Moreover, bald cypress is an excellent choice for erosion control on edges of natural waterways, ditches, ponds and lakes. Bald cypress makes a great addition to any landscape, natural area or public space throughout the state and provides a conceptual connection to nature and the great state of Louisiana.

## Requirements

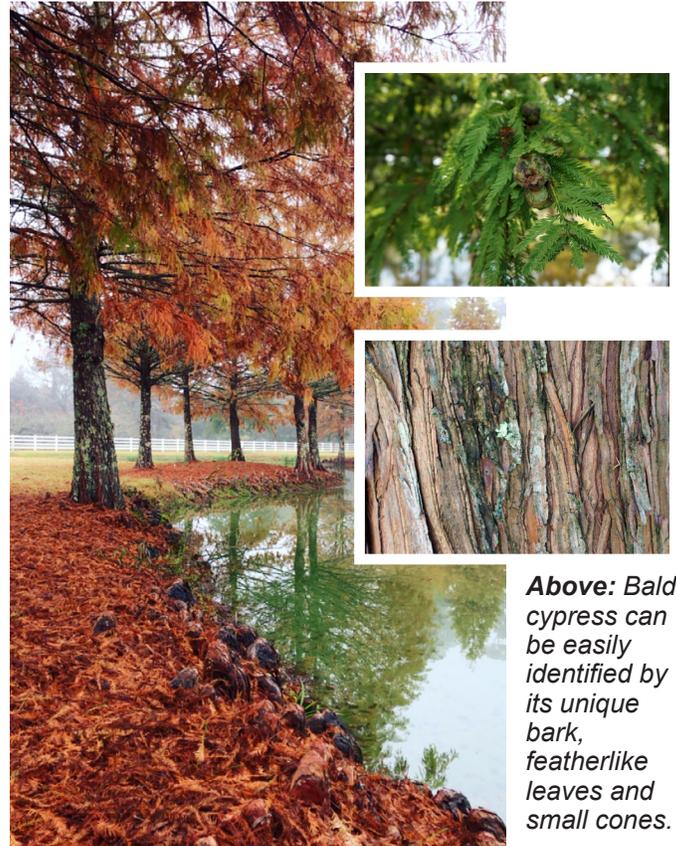
- This tree needs adequate room to grow. The root structure and knees can exist well beyond the canopy.
- Fall and winter are the best times to plant because weather conditions allow roots to establish prior to the spring growth period.
- Bald cypress is well adapted to various soil conditions and can often be seen near ponds or water.
- Applying one-half pound of 10-10-10 fertilizer at the base of the tree in springtime in the first year of establishment will accelerate growth. Do not fertilize in the fall or winter.

## Growth Habit

- Bald cypress has a natural pyramidal shape.
- Bald cypress leaves are alternate and produce cone fruit for reproduction.
- Bald cypress trees will likely form “knees,” or pneumatophores, which may extend two to three times the width of the canopy. The presence of knees is based upon individual genetics and environmental response. For instance, if the tree is in wetter conditions, there is a higher likelihood that there will be knees, but it is not a guarantee. There are cultivars that often produce fewer knees. Further, there is quite a debate about the purpose of bald cypress knees, but currently there is no universally accepted theory.

## Care and Maintenance

- Ensure proper soil moisture while the tree is establishing. Mulch young trees to help regulate soil moisture and keep weed pressure down. As the tree ages, falling leaves will provide a natural mulch source.
- Little to no maintenance pruning should be required for this tree. Minimal removal of lower branches for crown-raising purposes can be performed if desired.
- Bald cypress has few pest or disease issues.
- We do not recommend the removal of cypress knees.



*Above: Bald cypress can be easily identified by its unique bark, featherlike leaves and small cones.*

*Bald cypress are often planted for the fall color they bring to the landscape.*



*Bald cypress have a wide range of forms form short and wide to tall and slender.*

For more information on bald cypress and other Louisiana Super Plants, contact your local LSU AgCenter Extension Office or visit [LSUAgCenter.com/SuperPlants](http://LSUAgCenter.com/SuperPlants).

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