

Taxodium distichum – Bald Cypress

Taxodium distichum, commonly known as the Bald Cypress is unusual in that it is a deciduous conifer that sheds its foliage during early autumn. This is the source of its common name. The habit of the tree is upright with spreading branches. It is large, often to 30m in height, with a wide, buttressed, tapering trunk. It grows naturally in wet soils, swamps and flood-prone areas. It is native to middle United States where it is found from Illinois south, so it can take a range of climates, soils and frost. It is frequently found growing in water or in swampy inundated situations and in these conditions develops "Cypress knees" (distended roots).

Foliage is pinnately compound, soft and light green with a feathery or plume-like appearance and generally resembling that of other conifers. The new spring foliage is attractive and the autumn colour change is from orange to red as the leaflets drop away. Bark is light brown, furrowed, and scaly. Twigs near the end of the shoots persist, while those on the lower part of the stem are deciduous and fall with the leaves. Flowers are monoecious. Male catkins are at least 5 cm long and quite conspicuous during the winter months. Fruit is a golf-ball-sized cone that matures in the autumn.

Best grown in full sun to partial shade in rich moist soils. It will take drier conditions and has some drought tolerance, although coming as it does from cooler wetter conditions in the northern hemisphere this should not be exaggerated for Australian conditions. It is frost resistant in Australian conditions.

Bald Cypress can make an attractive ornamental feature or specimen and is used in some parts the US as a street tree. It is in limited cultivation for its timber, primarily because of its excellent decay resistance. It makes an excellent and popular bonsai subject.

Propagation

Propagation is straightforward although seed germinates more evenly and readily if pre-treated by 30 days cold stratification. To stratify soak the seed overnight and place in a ziplock bag with moist clean sand or perlite. Place the bag in the crisper. Check weekly to ensure the medium is lightly moist. Sow any seed that may germinate during stratification immediately. At the end of 30 days sow the seeds, sow lightly (cover seed to only about 3 to 5 mm) in a good medium potting mix. *Taxodium* likes light to germinate and a temperature in the range of 15 to 20°C, preferably in the higher end of that range.

Prick individual seedlings out into individual tubes as soon as they are large enough to handle and grow on until at least 15cm in height. Plant out in their permanent position after the danger of frost has passed. It likes a deep, moderately fertile and moisture retentive but well-drained soil and is best suited in a sheltered, sunny position plants,

and especially seedlings less than 2 years old, are frost tender so in cooler climates it is best to grow these on in conditions where they can be given some frost protection.



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