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Baldcypress (*Taxodium distichum*)

Nebraska Forest Service

Baldcypress (*Taxodium distichum*) is not a very common tree in Nebraska but it is beginning to gain more popularity. Baldcypress is most familiar as a swamp loving tree in a more southerly location but it is very adaptable and can be planted with success in Nebraska and Iowa. Baldcypress is a deciduous evergreen. It looks like a pine or spruce during the summer but then in the fall, the needles turn a lovely rust color and fall off. Sometimes those who are not familiar with the tree assume that it has died and have it cut down, a serious mistake.

Baldcypress is native to the Southeastern United States west to southern Illinois. It is Louisiana's state tree. There are almost no sites in Nebraska on which this tree couldn't grow well except for high pH soils and even then the tree is amazingly adaptable. It has been used as far north as Minnesota and southern Canada. Baldcypress can attain heights of well over 50 feet so it is considered a large tree. Realistically it may not get that big in this part of the country. The largest baldcypress in the country is in Francisville, LA and is 55 feet in circumference and 83 feet tall.

Most people think of baldcypress as a tree that does well on wet sites. But since wet sites mean low oxygen levels, baldcypress also does well in compacted soil situations. It can make a great park or landscape tree and is a nice alternative to the standard pine and spruce. A healthy baldcypress can stand up against high winds so Nebraska seems like its normal home in southern hurricane country.



Baldcypress has soft light green foliage in the summer months and provides a nice russet color in the fall. The bark is light brown, furrowed, and scaly. Buds are small and inconspicuous. Twigs near the end of the shoots persist in its native range, while those on the lower part of the stem are deciduous and fall with the leaves. In Nebraska, all the leaves fall off. The fruit is a golf-ball-sized cone that matures in the fall.

The wood of baldcypress is very light in weight and it is used for building construction. In its native habitat some roots develop above ground to find more oxygen. These cypress “knees”, as they are called, are often prized by wood carvers. In Nebraska the baldcypress rarely if ever develops “knees”.