

Thuja occidentalis

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Thuja occidentalis (*Eastern Arborvitae*, *Northern Whitecedar*) is an evergreen coniferous tree, in the cypress family Cupressaceae, which is widely cultivated for use as an ornamental plant. The endemic occurrence of this species is a north-eastern distribution in North America. It is thought to be the first tree of that region to be cultivated in the area in and around Europe.

Kingdom: Plantae

Division: Pinophyta

Class: Pinopsida

Order: Pinales

Family: Cupressaceae

Genus: *Thuja*

Species: ***T. occidentalis***

An evergreen tree with fan-like branches and scaly leaves. Unlike the closely related species, *Thuja plicata* (Western Redcedar), it is only a small tree. Growing to a height of 10-20 m tall

with a 0.4 m trunk diameter, exceptionally to 30 m tall and 1.6 m diameter, the tree is often stunted or prostrate. The bark is red-brown, furrowed and peels in narrow, longitudinal

strips. The foliage forms in flat sprays with scale-like leaves 3-5 mm long. The cones are slender, yellow-green ripening brown, 10-15 mm long and 4-5 mm broad, with 6-8 overlapping scales. The branches may take root if the tree falls.

The species was first described by Carolus Linnaeus in 1753, the name remains current. Common names include Eastern Arborvitae, American Arborvitae, Techny Arborvitae, or just Arborvitae, the last particularly in the horticultural trade. This name, arbor vitae, is derived from the tree of life motif - for the supposed medicinal properties of the sap, bark and twigs. Other names by which it is known include Northern Whitecedar, Eastern Whitecedar or White Cedar, and Swamp Cedar. *Thuja occidentalis* trees are unrelated to cedars, or to the Australian tree, *Melia azedarach*, also known as White Cedar. A large number of names for cultivars are used by horticulturalists.

It can be a very long-lived tree in certain conditions, with notably old specimens growing on cliffs where they are inaccessible to deer and wildfire; the oldest known living specimen is just over 1,100 years old, but a dead specimen with over 1,650 growth rings has been found. These very old trees are, despite their age, small and stunted due to the difficult growing conditions.

Thuja occidentalis is widely used as an ornamental tree, particularly for screens and hedges. Over 300 cultivars exist, with some of the more common ones being: 'Degroot's Spire', 'Ellwangeriana', 'Hetz Wintergreen', 'Lutea', 'Rheingold', 'Smaragd' (a.k.a. 'Emerald Green'), 'Techny', and 'Wareana'. It was introduced into Europe as early as 1540 and is widely cultivated now, especially in parks and cemeteries.

Northern white cedar is commercially used for rustic fencing and posts, lumber, poles, shingles and in the construction of log cabins. White cedar is the preferred wood for the structural elements, such as ribs and planking, of birchbark canoes and the planking of wooden canoes.

