For Landscape: Louisiana Cypress Tree

In South It Grows Large

By DWIGHT HALL

The Taxodium Distichum, better known as the Cypress tree, is native to Louisiana, Delaware and Florida and while it is hardy in the North, remains small there. In the South it grows as tall as 100 feet and 75 feet wide.

Until recently, the Cypress has been treated as a sub-family of the pine or Pinaceae Family, but several fundamental differences warrant its recognition as a separate family, the Taxodiaceae Family.

The rate of growth is fast until large (60), then growth becomes slow. The trunk of the tree has a broadened base, and irregular outgrowths from the roots called "kees." The bark of the tree is silvery to cinnamon-red fibrous, divided into flat ridges and shallow furrows. On older trees, the bark often forms loose flakes, providing the tree a coarse texture.

In contrast to the coarse textured trunk, the tiny leaves, which when new in the spring, are a delightful fern, are tiny and fine in texture, providing a beautiful, graceful, hanging character. The Spanish moss which often graces the cypress in Louisiana, the leaves are set evenly and closely along opposite sides of the twigs, resembling small fern fronds. In the autumn, these twigs, or branches fall with the tiny rust colored leaves still attached to the twigs. The leaves are late to fall usually covering the ground well after all other leaves have left their spring and summer beauty. The leaves are small, do not make an undesirable mess when fall age does fall compared to other deciduous trees, yet the tiny branches or twigs which fall with the leaves may be objectionable.

The cypress, like most coniferous species, produces pollen, producing cones or balls. On the cypress, they appear in long drooping clusters which are noticeable until leaves fall in the autumn. The roughened cones are about one inch in diameter.

Purple Tinge

The drooping panicles of flowers give the bare tree a delicate purple tinge in early spring before the foliage develops. The flower bolls which appear in late fall, are silver-gray during the winter. Although the tree lacks showy flowers, the striking character, interesting cones, details of foliage and color of new growth give the cypress an aesthetic ornamental quality quite its own. The cypress is a majestic tree which provides a definite character to extensive areas where native. The cypress has long been the interest of artists, and used for promotion of the states of Louisiana and Florida in phases of vacation paradise and areas of natural beauty.

The cypress was one of the chief lumber trees of the Mississippi River Flood Plain, and extended up smaller streams in most sections of Louisiana. Practically all of the virgin cypress swamps in particular are suitable to exposed weather and soil conditions in Louisiana. The State Museum in the Cabildo in New Orleans possesses a piece of a wooden cypress pipe which was buried for over 100 years.

Cypress Culture

The baldcypress grows best on its native soil of neutral to alkaline river bottom type soil, while the pondcypress (supposedly another variety of cypress but often assumed the same as baldcypress in Louisiana) is found growing native on acid soil. We assume that an average garden soil will be satisfactory for growing cypress.

The cypress grows in water, or in wet conditions, yet the plant does not require wet conditions to do well, as it will grow equally as well on a hill side. The tree sends up "kees" from the root system when grown in water conditions, which serve as a source of oxygen for the root system.

The cypress is often used for decorative purposes for planters and such.

Planting or transplanting is best done in early spring, just before the active new growth begins or when buds begin to swell. The younger the tree, the greater is the likelihood of success in transplanting. Very large trees should be transplanted by professionals and best results are always gained with nursery grown plants.

The cypress must be planted with a firm ball of earth large enough to include all the roots. The top of the tree is not pruned as a rule at transplanting, thus a special care must be taken to see that roots remain intact and not allowed to dry out. The cypress prefers sunny conditions; yet plants from shady conditions should not be transplanted to the open sun, but must be protected or shaded.

THE BIG CYPRESS TREE grows to 100 feet in the South. It is a good landscape tree with fine texture of foliage, conical form and coarse textured trunk.

Louisiana have been developed slogans which call attention to the durability of the valuable "wood eternal" or "wood wood. It is soft and easy to appropriate work and has many uses and after transplantation. Newly planted cypress should be mulched the first year, with straw or peat moss or similar materials to retain the moisture.