

"O Tannenbaum....."

Let's consider our ubiquitous evergreen Eastern Redcedar, which is not a true cedar, but actually a juniper, with the scientific name *Juniperus virginiana*! This native tree belongs to the same family as our western redwoods. It is a native juniper growing east of the Mississippi, with a normal range extending even further west.

Eastern Redcedars show up nicely along roadsides and in wooded areas these Winter days . Most folks growing up in the southeast have cut and decorated one for Christmas. Trees have a pleasant Christmasy fragrance, even if they are a bit prickly. Most tree shoppers now seem to prefer mountain Fraser firs and Norway spruce, or, heaven forbid, the artificial ones!

Image 1: Eastern Redcedar winterscape.



Eastern redcedars have male and female trees. The scientific term for this "animal like" (Dare I say!) condition is dioecious from Greek di = two and oikos = house. Male trees produce tiny pollen cones, at tips of branches that can give the whole tree a rusty orange color this time of year.

Image 2: Male (pollen)cones.



Females produce small, blue, two- or three-seeded berry-like cones, which when present in large numbers give trees a bluish sheen. Birds and small mammals really like these fleshy "cones." Juniper seeds have a tough resistant coat, and studies have shown that they pass through animal digestive tracts intact and are thereby better conditioned for germination. Birds plant many Eastern Red Cedars in fields and along roadsides. The versatile juniper "berries" have also traditionally been used to flavor gin, and in Native American and Folk medicine as a diuretic and a cold remedy. Berries are also used to flavor gin!

Image 3: Female (seed) cones.



Often there are some curious structures hanging from ends of juniper branches. One looks like an irregularly round medium brown lumps which may be one to several inches in diameter. These are tumor-like growths produced when the trees are infected with a fungus called cedar apple rust (*Gymnosporangium juniperi-virginianae*). It is called apple rust, because apple trees are the alternate host. When it is warm and damp, the brown lumps sprout bright orange jelly-like strands that produce spores. These spores infect apple leaves where another spore type is produced that will infect junipers.

Image 4: Cedar apple rust.



Juniper branches may also be infested with bag worm moths (*Thyridopteryx ephemeraeformis*) whose larvae feed on juniper leaves and then use them to help structure their silk bag cocoons. Only males will grow wings, hatch out of the cocoon and fly to find a female, confined to her "bag." After mating, the male dies and the female produces fertilized eggs and then dies. Next season these eggs will hatch into larvae that crawl out of their bags. To rid your junipers of these pests, just pull the bags off in the Fall and burn or trash them. There are other bagworms that feed on and inhabit other trees, including willow and spruce.

Image 5: Bagworm cocoon.



Eastern Redcedar wood has many uses, including linings for closets and "cedar" chests. Aromatic resins in the wood discourage moths. Juniper is also used for pencils and pet bedding. Because the wood resists decay, whole trunks from younger trees are harvested for long lasting fence posts. And, as mentioned previously, junipers keep wildlife fed in the winter.

Several attractive native and horticulture varieties of *Juniperus virginiana* are available for planting. They are hardy and make excellent screens. Hopefully more native savvy folks will choose these over exotics such as Leyland Cypress.

True cedars are members of the genus *Cedrus* and are referenced approximately fifty times in the Bible. Probably the best known reference is use of Cedar of Lebanon, *Cedrus libani*, to build Solomon's temple (I Kings 5:6-10), and cedar wood is considered the quintessential "Righteous Wood." The misleading common name "Cedar" probably came about when biblically literate North American colonists and pioneers gave the name "cedar" to junipers and other evergreen trees whether or not they were true cedars.