

## Mexican cypress

*Cupressus lusitanica* Mill.

Cypress family (Cupressaceae)

Post-Cook introduction

Mexican cypress is an introduced conifer of gardens and old farm lots and also of forest plantations, where it has been tested. The paired scalelike leaves on 4-angled twigs have an inconspicuous gland dot on back, and the rounded, hard, brown cones are about  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch (15 mm) in diameter.

A medium-sized evergreen tree, resinous and aromatic, becoming 40 ft (12 m) high and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ft (0.5 m) in trunk diameter, with straight erect axis and dense regular or narrow crown of green to dark green foliage. Bark reddish brown, smooth to fissured, and sometimes with a few scales or shreddy. Inner bark whitish, slightly fibrous, and slightly resinous. Leafy twigs alternate, numerous, spreading, branching regularly in 4 rows, less than  $\frac{1}{16}$  inch (1.5 mm) in diameter. Older twigs reddish brown, rough and scaly, with dead leaves persistent.

Leaves crowded, opposite in four rows, mostly dark green, scalelike, pressed against twig, less than  $\frac{1}{16}$  inch (1.5 mm) long, short-pointed, angled or keeled, with inconspicuous gland dot, covering twig and shedding together. The foliage has a resinous odor and taste.

Pollen and seeds are borne on the same tree (monoecious). Male cones numerous toward the apex of short branches, cylindrical,  $\frac{3}{16}$  inch (5 mm) long and less than  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch (3 mm) broad, greenish yellow, the scales in 4 rows bearing pollen sacs and pollen. Female cones (strobili) begin as a few inconspicuous green scales less than  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch (3 mm) across, with naked ovules, at the end of short twigs. At maturity the second year, the hard woody cone, about  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch (15 mm) in diameter, changes from whitish green to dull brown. It is composed mostly of 8 rounded but angular cone-scales, pressed together at edges, each with a stout central raised point about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch (3 mm) high. Later, the cone opens to free numerous brown seeds more than  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch (3 mm) long, irregularly flattened with borders slightly winged.

The sapwood is pale brown and the heartwood pinkish brown, not distinct from the sapwood. The wood is a moderately lightweight softwood (sp. gr. 0.40), finetextured and fragrant, but not durable (Scott 1953). Used for construction and furniture elsewhere, but not

in Hawaii.

Occasionally, Mexican cypress has been planted in the Forest Reserves. These plantings total only 3700 trees for the entire State. The Division of Forestry in 1929 planted 62 trees on Kapapa Island off Oahu and 100 trees at Kahuku also on Oahu. Another planting site was Waihou Spring Forest Reserve on Maui. This species is suited primarily to lower elevations and is reported by Bryan (1947) to grow very rapidly. It is used primarily as an ornamental and windbreak in Hawaii. Trees seen in old homesteads often were planted by Portuguese settlers along with *Cupressus macrocarpa* to remind them of Portugal and the Azores.

For ornament, the plants can be pruned in different shapes or trimmed as living hedges. Small symmetric plants 3–6 ft (0.9–1.8 m) high would serve as attractive Christmas trees and could be grown in plantations for this purpose. The leafy branches also serve for decorations and wreaths. The trees are subject to windthrow on poorly drained soils.

### **Champion**

Height 45 ft (13.7 m, c.b.h. 3.3 ft (1.0 m), spread 32 ft (10.0 m). Honaunau Forest Reserve, Kailua-Kona, Hawaii (1968).

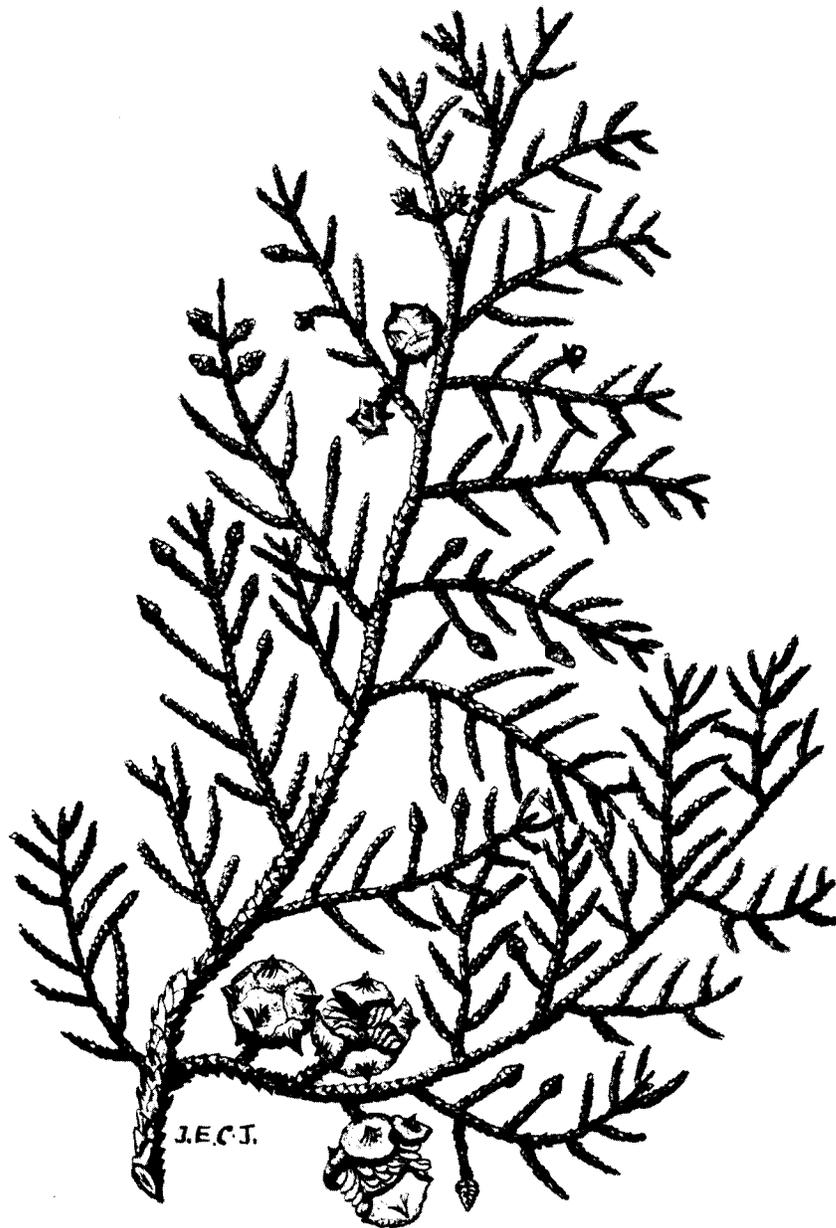
### **Range**

Native in mountains of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Widely spread in cultivation and naturalized southward in mountains of Central America to Costa Rica, in Andes from Colombia and Venezuela to Argentina and Chile and in the Old World. Introduced in northern Florida. In Kenya it is grown extensively and has become an important timber tree. Common in South Africa.

### **Botanical synonym**

*Cupressus benthamii* Endl., *C. lindleyi* Klotzsch

This variable species consists of several forms. One has drooping or weeping branches and another a very long and narrow columnar crown. The scientific name, meaning “of Lusitania,” an old name of Portugal, was based on planted trees in that country before the origin was definitely known.



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Twig with cones and male cones, 1 X.