

Calocedrus decurrens

[Synonyms : *Heyderia decurrens*, *Libocedrus craigana*, *Libocedrus decurrens*, *Thuja gigantea*]
INCENSE CEDAR is an evergreen tree. Native to California and Oregon in the United States it has small, light reddish-brown cones.

It is also known as Bastard cedar, California calocedar, California incense cedar, Californian incense cedar, California post cedar, Californian white cedar, Cedar, *Cedertuja* (Swedish), Juniper, *Kalifornische Weihrauchzedder* (German), *Pazerav sbihavý* (Czech), Pencil cedar, Post cedar, *Rauchzypresse* (German), Red cedar, Roughbark cedar, *Tuoksusetri* (Finnish), and White cedar.

Warning – contact with the fresh wood may cause dermatitis.

Decurrens means ‘running down’ with reference to how the base of the leaves merge with the stem.

Dense leafy stems were used by the North American Round Valley Indian tribe of California to disperse water gently through acorn meal to rinse it free of sand and grit, a process which was said to impart the tree’s flavour to the meal.

The Cahuilla Indians used the fragrant bark to construct their temporary camps that they set up in the Autumn when they were harvesting acorns (*Quercus*). It was also used by the Paiute tribe for making their berry baskets.

Hunting bows preferred by Round Valley Indians were made from small branches, and the Washo made their bows from this wood as well. Bundles of small branches and twigs were also used by the Karok tribe for brooms, while the Klamath Indians were practised at twirling the small twigs together rapidly to ignite their fires.

In contrast to their Autumn camps the Cahuilla used the wood itself to build their permanent homes, and records show how the Karok made building boards out of it as well. For the Paiute the soft and lightweight wood provided material for fence posts, while the Klamath fashioned baskets and made fire blocks from it.

Unlike the Klamath tribe the Maidu Indians preferred to use the roots for basketwork.

Records suggest that incense cedar had few medicinal applications. Klamath Indians included it in their medicine chest, the Paiute used it for treating colds, and the Mendocino Indian tribe employed it in remedies for some stomach disorders.

The light brown wood has been used for railway sleepers, agricultural buildings (and feed troughs), grave linings, mothproof chests and boxes and toys. It has also been burnt as fuel. Today the wood (which does not splinter) is still used commercially for the outer-casing of pencils and accounts for 75% of the world’s supply. It is also used still for fencing, shingles, furniture and interior building finishes.