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### *Pinus pinea*

**STONE PINE** is an evergreen tree. Native to the northern Mediterranean (particularly the Aegean Islands) and to the western Peloponnese (south-western Greece), it has needle-like leaves and oval glossy, pale brown cones.

It is also known as *Borovice pinie* (Czech), Italian stone pine, *Italienische Steinkiefer* (German), *Mittelmeer-Pinie* (German), Pine, Pine nut, *Pinie* (German), *Pinio* (Esperanto), *Pinja* (Finnish), *Pino da pinoli* (Italian), *Pino domestico* (Italian), *Piñón* (Spanish), *Pino piñonero* (Canary Island, Spanish), *Pin parasol* (French), *Pin pignon* (French), and Umbrella pine.

The cones remain closed for three years. They contain dark brown seeds (pine nuts) between their scales, and these contain edible, ivory or yellowish-white kernels. The edible seeds, sometimes referred to as ‘nuts’ or *pignons*, have a resinous spicy, almond-type taste.

The cones are heated in sunlight and as they open the seeds are removed and mechanically crushed to release the kernels from their shells.

*Pinea* is Latin (made of pine) meaning ‘of pine’.

The stone pine was sacred to the Greek goddess, Cybele, who was mistress of wild nature.

The edible seeds were familiar to the ancient Egyptians and have been identified by archaeologists in some of the digs there.

Like peanuts (*Arachis hypogaea*) the pine nuts are eaten raw or roasted and salted. Today ‘pine nuts’ (*pignoles* (French), *pinocchio* (Italian)) are a commercial ingredient used by the food industry, particularly in confectionery and vegetarian food.

The trees are sometimes planted as windbreaks or as ornamental plants.

On the occasions when a stone pine is used as a Christmas tree it, even more than its close relatives, can sometimes cause some excitement. The warmth inside the house dries its cones rapidly and the woody scales can open with sufficient force to shoot the seeds lying between them out across a room.

The wood is used nowadays for cabinet-making and carpentry.