

Taxodium distichum

[Synonyms : *Cupressus disticha*]

SWAMP CYPRESS is a deciduous coniferous tree. Native to eastern North America it has purplish catkins and needle-like leaves that turn orange brown in Autumn.

It is also known as Bald cypress, Black cypress, Buck cypress, Canoe water pine, Chinese swamp cypress, Common bald cypress, Common swamp cypress, Cow cypress, Cypress, Deciduous cypress, Gulf cypress, Gulf red cypress, Knee cypress, Louisiana black cypress, Louisiana cypress, Louisiana red cypress, Pecky cypress, Pond bald cypress, Pond cypress, Red cypress, River cypress, Southern cypress, Sumpcypress, *Sumpfzypresse* (German), Tidewater red cypress, *Tisovec dvojradový* (Slovak), *Tisovec dvouřadý* (Czech), Upland cypress, White cypress, and Yellow cypress.

The roots are supplemented (particularly in very wet sites) with cylindrical hollow woody humps (known as ‘cypress-knees’) which can grow as high as eight feet. The function of which are still debated. Like the dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) the slender branches themselves (that bear the needle-like leaves) fall off in Winter.

The wood is known as ‘cypress’.

Distichum is derived from Greek *di-* (two, twice) and *-stichos* (rank, row) components meaning ‘in two rows’ with reference to the arrangement of the leaves.

The name Pecky cypress describes the state of the wood which often contains random pockets attacked by fungus.

Cypress-knees were used in the past as beehives by some North American Indian tribes – and then by some of the European merchantmen for securing the hulls of their sailing ships. In more recent times they have sometimes been sold to tourists as curiosities. Botanists seem as yet to be uncertain about their natural function. They note that when the swamp cypress is growing in dry land instead of in the middle of shallow water the cypress-knees are less likely to grow. Although it seems to be discounted today some have posed in the past the thought that this strange phenomenon might have the function of providing air channels to the root tissues.

North American Choctaw Indians used the bark fibre to make cordage.

Prized often beyond any other wood on the North American Continent for its durability this attractively grained wood has been used for heavy construction and for making railway sleepers and coffins. It has also provided material for fencing and for making pumps and barrels. It has been used for boat building too, as well as cooling towers, stadia seating, building interiors, tanks, refrigerators, poles, shingling and fencing. Today this light yellowish-brown to dark brownish-red, or chocolate heartwood is said to be particularly valued for construction, interior finishing, garden furniture and cabinetwork.

Swamp cypress was adopted as a state emblem by Louisiana in the United States in 1963.