

# CONIFERS FOR CENTRAL FLORIDA

Part Two of a Two-Part Series

Another tree with an interesting history and also a “living fossil” is *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, the Dawn Redwood. Fossils of a *Metasequoia* were discovered and named in 1941. The fossils dated back to the Cretaceous period. Also in 1941, an unknown grove of trees was discovered in south-central China. In 1945, they were determined to be living *Metasequoia* specimens. In 1948, the first seeds were sent to the United States. Since that time, Dawn Redwood has become a common tree used in temperate areas. It is a deciduous conifer with ferny foliage and is similar to our native Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*). In central Florida, it has a moderate rate of growth and can reach 80-100 feet tall. Dawn Redwood has a

have been developed. These are usually slower growing. ‘Gold Rush’, also known as ‘Ogon’, has golden foliage that fades to green in summer heat. ‘Jack Frost’ has white markings on the foliage that will eventually fade during summer. ‘Miss Grace’ is a smaller growing tree with a weeping habit. ‘Waasland’ is a columnar growing form with dark, almost black colored bark. ‘White Spot’ also has some white markings on the foliage and a slighty weeping habit. *Metasequoia* is a member of the *Cupressaceae* Family.

The *Cupressaceae* Family contains other members which grow well in central Florida. Chinese Cypress, *Glyptostrobus pensilis*, is native to southeastern China and northern Vietnam. It is another

deciduous conifer similar to Bald Cypress. It has bright green foliage and grows 70-90 feet tall. Chinese Cypress likes moist soil and can also grow in shallow water where it will produce “knees”.

*Chamaecyparis thyoides* var. *henryae*, Southern White Cedar is a southeastern U.S.

native that extends into central Florida. This evergreen tree has bluish green foliage and can grow 40-50 feet tall. It is a dense grower. Southern White Cedar likes moist soil and it will even grow in boggy, wet soil. ‘Shiva’ is a dwarf cultivar growing 3-5 feet tall with ferny foliage.

*Cryptomeria japonica*, Japanese Cedar, is a conifer that has long been popular

in horticulture but not much cultivated in central Florida. It is an evergreen tree growing 40-60 feet tall. It likes sun or light shade and moist soil. Dozens of cultivars of this tree have been developed and introduced. These are variable in height and appearance; many are dwarfs suitable for smaller landscapes.

‘Araucaroides’ grows 10-15 feet tall. It has an open and symmetrical habit of growth and resembles an *Araucaria*. ‘Black Dragon’ is a dwarf form growing 3-5 feet tall. The foliage is dense and dark green. ‘Cristata’ has flat, cockscomb-like foliage. ‘Gyokruya’ is another dwarf form with very dark green foliage. ‘Spiralis’ is an upright form with twisted and spiraled foliage. ‘Yoshino’ has bright green foliage with a dense growth habit. It develops a columnar form. *C. japonica* var. *sinensis* is a form native to southern China. It is a vigorous grower with an open growth habit.

*Cunninghamiana lanceolata*, China Fir is native to southern China, Taiwan and northern Vietnam. It is an evergreen tree growing 40-60 feet tall. It has dark green, spiny foliage and resembles an *Araucaria*. Older trees shed their lower branches. ‘Glauca’ is an attractive form with silvery-blue foliage and usually doesn’t get as tall. *C. konishii*, Taiwan Fir, is native to Taiwan. It has smaller leaves than those of *C. lanceolata* and is darker green. ‘Little Leo’ is a dwarf form that only grows 2-3 feet tall. *C. unicanaliculata* is a species that is now lumped into *C. lanceolata*. It is a distinct form that has larger, triangular leaves that are not as spiny.

Species that belong to the genus *Cupressus* are the “true” Cypress. *Cupressus arizonica* var. *glabra*, Arizona Cypress, is a conifer that has become more common in local landscapes in recent years. This



*Afrocarpus gracilior*

very straight trunk with a pyramidal growth habit. The trunk has reddish brown bark that is fissured and older trees often develop a buttress. The foliage usually turns a nice orange or reddish coloring in fall before dropping. It needs moist soil and can even grow in wet locations but not in standing water. Since its introduction, several cultivars

is an attractive evergreen tree that grows 20-30 feet tall. The foliage is a blue green or even silvery green in some cultivars. The trunks also have attractive peeling bark that is reddish brown. It needs full sun and is very drought tolerant once it is established. Several cultivars are available including 'Blue Ice', 'Blue Pyramid', 'Carolina Sapphire' and 'Glauca'. It is originally native to southern Arizona . *Cupressus sempervirens*, the Italian Cypress, is an evergreen conifer with a narrow, horizontal growth habit. It can grow 40-50 feet tall and has a formal look. Italian Cypress needs full sun and a well-drained soil. Older trees are susceptible to fungus in our humid climate. It is native to the eastern Mediterranean region.

*Fokienia hodginsii*, Fujian Cypress, is an evergreen tree that grows over 50 feet tall in habitat but reaches 20-25 feet in cultivation. It is native to southeastern China and northern Laos and Vietnam. The foliage is soft and dark green with white banding on the undersides. It grows in a flattened pattern along the branches. The tree has a columnar form. This is a rare conifer but is an excellent grower for subtropical gardens.

*Taiwania cryptomerioides*, Taiwania, is an evergreen tree from Taiwan, southern China, and northern Myanmar. In habitat, these trees grow over 100 feet tall; however, in cultivation they will reach 30-50 feet. The tree has a conical shape with horizontal branches. The foliage is stiff and blue green in color. This is an attractive tree that is little cultivated but an excellent specimen for subtropical gardens.

The Cephalotaxaceae Family contains the genus

Cephalotaxus which has several species that grow well in central Florida.

*Cephalotaxus harringtonia*, Japanese Plum-Yew,



*Metasequoia glyptostroboides* fall color

is an evergreen conifer that is heat tolerant and a good substitute for the Yews (*Taxus*) that are common in northern landscapes. It is a large shrub or tree growing 20-25 feet tall with soft, dark green linear leaves. It can tolerate morning sun but needs at least a light filtered shade in afternoon. It tolerates pruning and can be kept as a large shrub or screen. A couple smaller cultivars are useful in smaller gardens. 'Duke Gardens' is a dwarf growing 3-4 feet tall. It has a dense growth habit and makes an excellent hedge. 'Prostrata' is a low growing form that only reaches 1-2 feet tall and has a spreading habit. There is also var. *drupacea* that grows to about 20 feet tall but has shorter needles and drooping branches. *C. harringtonia* is native from northeastern India to China, Taiwan and Japan. Two other species from southern China, *C. fortunei* and *C. sinensis*, show good potential for our climate.

The Podocarpaceae Family contains several members that are common in Florida gardens. *Afrocarpus gracilior*, Fern or Weeping Podocarpus, is common in southern Florida and the warmer areas of central Florida. It is an evergreen tree growing 40-50 feet tall. It tolerates pruning well and can be used as a hedge or screen. The foliage is narrow, soft and bright green. It is native to mountainous regions of eastern Africa. It was formerly known as *Podocarpus garcilor*. *Nageia nagi*, is known as the Nagi or Broadleaf Podocarpus. It is an evergreen tree reaching 30-40 feet tall. It was formerly named *Podocarpus nagi*. This tree was common decades ago but has become difficult to locate in nurseries now days. It has broad, leathery foliage that is dark green. It will grow in full sun or deep shade and also tolerates pruning well. Nagi is also very wind resistant. This



*Nageia nagi*

is the tree that held up best during the three hurricanes that struck in 2004. The Nagi trees suffered no damage, few leaves were blown off the trees. *N. nagi* is native to southern China, southern Japan, and Taiwan.

*Podocarpus macrophyllus*, Japanese Podocarpus, is one of the most commonly seen conifers used in this area. It is native to southern Japan and Taiwan and is an evergreen tree that can grow 30-40 feet tall. It has an excellent tolerance for pruning and can be used as a hedge, screen or for topiaries. It is rarely grown as a tree but makes an excellent specimen. 'Maki' is a cultivar that only grows 8-10 feet tall. It has a dense growth habit and shorter leaves. This is the form that is usually encountered in local landscapes. 'Dwarf Pringles' is a dwarf form growing 3-4 feet tall. 'Variegata' has white markings on the leaves. *P. elongatus* is from South Africa and is called Yellowwood. It has soft foliage and resembles *Afrocarpus gracilior* but is hardier to cold. It also tolerates pruning and makes a good screen, hedge, or specimen tree. 'Icee Blue' is a cultivar that has new growth with a silvery blue coloring.

– Eric Schmidt