



Tree of the Month • October | November 2017

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Baldcypress, *Taxodium distichum*

Baldcypress, contrary to what most Chicagoans realize, is a native Illinois tree. Although it is found naturally growing more readily in the southern parts of our state it can survive and thrive in the Chicago area. It loves wet boggy like soil conditions and its wood is wonderfully resistant to both rot and insects.

Probably one of the most distinctive characteristics of this beautiful and majestic tree is the fact that it is a needle bearing, cone producing deciduous tree that drops its leaves in the fall after a brilliant show of autumn color. Another unusual identification feature is its propensity to grow “knees” under its branch spread sticking up out of the ground looking much like supporting buttresses.

Baldcypress actually grow well in stagnant water, once again defying our rules about tree growth. However, its seeds need a dry spot to germinate. It, like the Mangrove, is an exception when it comes to being able to grow without oxygenated soil, however, the “knees” of the Baldcypress are thought, like the aerial roots of the Mangrove, to provide aeration to these potential giants. The Baldcypress can live for 600 years and grow to heights of 150’ tall. Some specimens have been thought to survive up to 1000 or more years, although our imprudent ancestors did not preserve many if any of these magnificent



The characteristic knees in the drip line of the Baldcypress tree which is growing on the edge of a lagoon here.

specimens for us to appreciate and enjoy today. The rot resistance and bug defying attributes of this great tree made it a prime candidate for exploitation. However, there is a huge specimen in Oaxaca, Mexico that is named El Tule and is believed to be between 2000-4000 years old. Its ancestors were considered to be sacred trees by the Aztecs due to its ability to join the water in earth to the sun in the sky.

The next time you have a wet location that needs a tree, think of the Baldcypress, a great alternative to the common Willow for wetter locations



Spectacular autumn color of the stately Baldcypress, located at Chicago Botanic Garden. Photos by Lesley Bruce Smith