

Eastern Redcedar

Juniperus virginiana

Common name:

Eastern Redcedar, Pencil Cedar, Eastern Juniper, Virginia Juniper, Red Juniper

Pronunciation:

ju-NIP-er-us ver-jin-ee-A-na

Family:

Cupressaceae

Genus:

Juniperus

"No stone-walled hilltop too bleak, no abandoned field too thin of soil but that the dark and resolute figure of the Red Cedar may takes its stand there, enduring, with luck, perhaps three centuries."

"The earliest explorers of the Atlantic seaboard did not fail to mention so handsome, so fragrant a tree as this one...The early colonists recognized the value of the Virginia Juniper from the start -- for fences and shingles, benches and tables, coffins and the superstructure of boats. So easy was it to split with the frow and to smooth with the plane that it could be worked even by people as woefully ill-prepared for wilderness life as the theologian-tradesmen and overdressed goldhunters who first sought our shores."

(excerpts from Donald Culross Peattie, *A Natural History of Trees of Eastern and Central North America*)

Quick ID Tips

- Tiny, scale-like leaves pressed closely together on all but the youngest trees
- Red bark shredding off (exfoliating) in long strips
- Bluish seed cones look like berries

Details

- Coniferous, evergreen tree that grows to 40-50 ft. Densely pyramidal when young, slightly pendulous with age. This is a pioneer tree, one of the first to grow in abandoned agricultural lands, along roadsides, and other cleared areas (e.g., logging sites). It is also fire tolerant.
- Bark gray to red-brown, exfoliating (shredding off) in long strips.
- Leaves are of two types: sharp and prickly-pointed on younger trees and overlapping, scale-like, on older trees.

- scale leaves are opposite, arranged in 4 ranks, closely pressed and overlapping, 1.5-2.0 mm long, medium green in summer and dirty green, brown in winter, needles and scale leaves often on the same branch, bruised leaves have cedar chest odor.
- Usually dioecious - male and female trees.
- The seed cones (the fruit) resemble "berries" and are 6 mm wide, dark blue with a whitish bloom. The cones ripen in the autumn in their first year and thereafter. Cedar waxwings in particular like to feed on these "berries."
- Prefers sun and is tolerant of adverse conditions, but thrives best in a deep, moist, well-drained loamy soil.
- Hardy in USDA Zones 3b-9. Native to eastern and central North America to Rocky Mountains; the most widely distributed conifer of the eastern U.S. and the only juniper species east of the Mississippi River. Many different cultivars and varieties are commercially available.
- Cedar wood is extremely durable and resistant to decay; it is often used for fenceposts and roofing ("cedar shakes"). The aromatic wood repels insects and is used in cedar chests and closets for storing fabrics. The fibrous bark is used for weaving cloth and mats, and birds commonly used the fibers for nest building.



common shape-old field



older tree shape



overlapping scales on needles



branch with seed cones (fruit)



seed cones



branchlets, winter



bark

Sources:

- Oregon State University Landscape Plants, <https://landscapeplants.oregonstate.edu/plants/juniperus-virginiana>
- David Sibley, *The Sibley Guide to Trees* (Knopf 2009)