

## Italian Cypress and Mast Tree: Two Trees for Small Spaces in South Florida



Mid-April

### *Cupressus sempervirens*

**Common Name:** Italian Cypress  
**Origin:** Mediterranean region, western Asia  
**Habitat:** Hot dry summers; mild, rainy winters  
**U.S.D.A. Zone:** 7b-10b (Minimum 5°F)  
**Growth Rate:** Moderate  
**Crown Density:** Dense  
**Typical Dimensions:** 20 to 40 feet high x 3 to 6 feet wide  
**Light Requirements:** High  
**Flower Characteristic:** Inconspicuous  
**Flowering Seasons:** Spring, early summer  
**Leaf Persistence:** Evergreen  
**Salt Tolerance:** Moderate  
**Drought Tolerance:** High  
**Soil Requirements:** Wide, well-drained  
**Nutritional Requirements:** Medium  
**Major Potential Problems:** Fungal blight, mites  
**Propagation:** Cuttings, air layers  
**Human Hazards:** None  
**Common Uses:** Specimen, tall screens, privacy (living fences)



Mid-June

### *Polyalthia longifolia* 'Pendula'

**Common Names:** Mast Tree, False Ashoka, Asoka  
**Origin:** India, Sri Lanka  
**Habitat:** Lowland rainforests, dry or humid  
**U.S.D.A. Zone:** 10a-12b (Minimum 32°F)  
**Growth Rate:** Moderate  
**Typical Dimensions:** 30 to 45 feet high x 8 to 10 feet wide  
**Light Requirements:** High  
**Flower Characteristics:** Inconspicuous  
**Flowering Seasons:** Spring, early summer  
**Leaf Persistence:** Evergreen  
**Salt Tolerance:** Moderate  
**Drought Tolerance:** Medium  
**Soil Requirements:** Wide, well-drained  
**Nutritional Requirements:** Medium  
**Major Potential Pests:** None of concern  
**Propagation:** Seeds  
**Human Hazards:** None  
**Common Uses:** Specimen, avenues, tall screens, wind blocks

### **Columnar and Fastigate Trees**

Basic tree shape is genetically determined by species, variety or cultivar. A tree's shape may be modified by competition such as crowding, cultivation or adverse environmental factors. Trees that are naturally narrow, usually with a single trunk, and have a shorter, uniform branch spread are referred to as columnar trees. Trees that have several branches that grow erect together to form a uniform narrow crown are referred to as fastigate trees. The two names are often interchanged.

Columnar and fastigate trees are ideally suited for framing entrance ways or large buildings. They make ideal candidates for landscape areas where space is restricted, such as parkway strips, areas between the street and the sidewalk, or driveways. These narrow-crowned trees are often recommended in parking lots, smaller home landscapes, or in confined growing spaces where wide-spreading tree branches would not be appropriate.

### **Italian Cypress**

Italian cypress is the classic Mediterranean landscape tree. It is monoecious, having separate male and female flowers on the same plant. Seldom seen in its species form, it is better known for its cutting grown columnar cultivars. The most common columnar cultivars are 'Stricta' with dark green foliage and 'Glauca' with blue-green foliage. 'Horizontalis' has horizontally spreading branches. Seedling trees of Italian cypress are dark green and pyramidal.

Italian cypress is grown throughout the state but in South Florida it rarely gets above 40 feet. Trees are usually not more than three to six feet wide. In the western United States, trees are decidedly more robust and taller. Despite this, they make a fine addition to the Florida landscape.

Italian Cypress is often used for framing, as a strong accent around large buildings, or in formal landscapes. Planted three feet apart, they make a dense screen. Their scale-like leaves gives a very fine texture to any setting. Italian cypress is increasingly gaining popularity in South Florida's landscapes and gardens and they are widely available for purchase.

### **Pruning and Potential Problems of Italian Cypress**

Italian Cypress should not be pruned. The trees are normally not more than four feet wide. They are susceptible to spider mites and bacterial blight. Bagworms are an occasional problem. Root rot can be a problem in poorly drained soils.

### **Mast Tree**

*Polyalthia longifolia* is in the Annoniaceae family and is related to commonly consumed fruits such as custard apple, soursop, and sugar apple. 'Pendula' is a narrowly fastigated variety with short, pendulous limbs that sweep to the ground. The leaves are narrowly elongated and undulated along their edges. In spring, the tree blooms briefly with a profusion of tiny, starry, pale green flowers.

The Mast Tree is rarely found in South Florida. It essentially serves the same function as the Italian Cypress but with less formality because of its larger leaves and less polished canopy. 'Pendula' is a very popular street tree in some parts of the tropics.



Italian Cypress



Mast Tree



Italian Cypress, late April



Mast Tree, late June.



Italian Cypresses, late July



Mast Trees, early June

## References

- Barwick, M. 2005. [Tropical & Subtropical Trees: An Encyclopedia](#). Timber Press, Portland, OR
- Brigham, S. 2003. [Ornamental Trees of San Diego: Mediterranean Climate Trees for the Garden](#). San Diego Horticultural Society, Encinitas, CA
- Dehgan, B. 1998. [Landscape Plants for Subtropical Climates](#). University Press of Florida, Gainesville, FL
- Gilman, E. and D. Watson. 2011. [Cupressus sempervirens 'Glauca': 'Glauca' Italian Cypress](#). ENH385. UF/IFAS, Gainesville, FL
- Broschat, T., and A. Meerow. 2001. [Betrock's Reference Guide to Florida Landscape Plants](#). Betrock Information Systems, Inc. Hollywood, FL

## Lee County Extension Fact Sheets

[How to Identify a Tree](#)

[Lignum-vitae](#)

[Native Plant Fact Sheets](#)

[Norfolk Island Pine Hurricane Recovery](#)

[Planting Distances for Trees and Palms](#)

['Shady Lady' Black Olive](#)

[Small Trees for South Florida](#)

[Tropical Almond](#)

## Videos

[How to Prune a Cabbage Palm](#)

[Landscape YouTube Channel](#)

[Red Mangrove](#)

All pictures taken by Stephen Brown.

This fact sheet was reviewed by Karen Headlee, Lee County Extension