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



Mid-April



Mid-June

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)

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 Fastigiate 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 fastigiate trees. The two names are often interchanged.

Columnar and fastigiate 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.

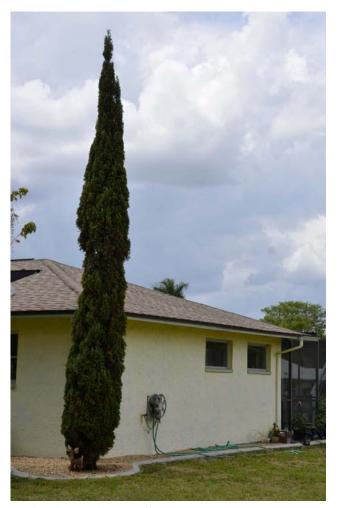
Mast Tree

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 fastigiated 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



Italian Cypress, late April



Mast Tree



Mast Tree, late June.



Italian Cypresses, late July



Mast Trees, early June

References

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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

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Videos

How to Prune a Cabbage Palm

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All pictures taken by Stephen Brown.

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

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