

White cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*)

Family: Cypress
(Cupressaceae)

DESCRIPTION: White cedar, also known as arborvitae, is a slow-growing, long-living evergreen most commonly found in coniferous bogs, and along lakeshores and streambanks of northeastern Minnesota.

USES: Known to the Ojibwe as Nookomis Giizhik (Grandmother Cedar), it is considered a gift to humanity for its many uses including crafts and construction material plus ceremonial, medicinal, protection and purification purposes. It is one of the four sacred plants of the Ojibwe medicine wheel. Leaves are rich in vitamin C and were historically used to treat scurvy. The plant contains a neurotoxin, so prolonged use can be harmful. The plant's leaves, oil and ash have been used to treat a variety of ailments. Oil has been used as a disinfectant, insecticide and cleaner. The decay resistant wood is used to build decks, and for poles and fence posts. The tree provides cover for wildlife including deer, which heavily browse it in winter. The foliage and seeds feed an array of wildlife. Birds nest in its dense branches.



Photo Credit: Paul Erdmann

STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS: FACW

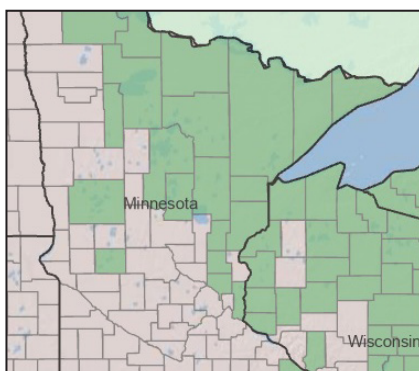
ID: The tree has a distinct cedar smell and grows as tall as 50 feet. Flat, fan-like branches and opposite leaves have overlapping scales that are soft to the touch. Leaves are bright green, then turn brown after the first year. Bark is reddish-brown, turning gray with age, and peels in long narrow strips. Cones shorter than a half-inch long, are green to pinkish brown when immature, turning dark brown at maturity with scales opening to release seeds in the fall.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Its flat, fan-like leaves and small cones distinguish it from other native Minnesota evergreens. Eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) has sharp-pointed, awl-shaped leaves.

Planting Recommendations

White cedar is widely used in residential areas as an ornamental tree, particularly for screens and hedges, and is found in parks and cemeteries where to some it is a symbol of eternal life. Over 120 cultivars exist. It prefers full sun or light shade, moist conditions, and peaty calcium-rich soil, but it is highly adaptable. Both bare-

root and containerized white cedar trees are available. Fall-planted seeds allow winter conditions to naturally break dormancy, but germination rates tend to be about 35%. In wetlands, trees are planted on mounds to avoid over-saturation. Fencing protects seedlings from browsing.



Range Map Credit: NRCS Plants Database

Developed by Paul Erdmann, an ecological science conservationist with the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources.

REFERENCES:
[Keweenaw Bay Indian Community Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
[The Friends of the Wild Flower Garden Illinois Wildflowers](#)

