

Hinoki (or False) Cypress - *Chamaecyparis* sp.

**General Information:** This broad, sweeping, conical-shaped evergreen has graceful, flattened, fern-like branchlets which gently droop at branch tips.

Hinoki

Falsecypress reaches 50 to 75 feet in height with a spread of 10 to 20 feet, has dark green foliage, and attractive, shredding, reddish-brown bark which peels off in long narrow strips.

The easiest false cypress to keep alive is the Hinoki cypress, *C. obtusa*. Many report great success in growing it, but unfortunately, it seems to be one of the most difficult to keep in proper bonsai form due to the whorling fan pattern of the foliage. Boulevard cypress (*C. pisifera* 'Boulevard') and *Chamaecyparis thyoides* 'Andelyensis Conica', Andelyensis cypress, seem to be the varieties which cause the most grief.

**Family:** *Cupressaceae*

**Lighting:** Full sun, in all but the hottest climates, is ESSENTIAL. Without proper lighting, lower and inner branches brown and die, which is a serious problem because *Chamaecyparis* will not bud back on old wood. Many books recommend putting these trees in the shade, but this seems to be a strategy to avoid having the soil dry out completely (see watering, below).

**Temperature:** Zone 5 - 8A. Most *Chamaecyparis* species are hardy to -10F, but are in danger of die-back from cold, drying winds. Some degree of frost/wind protection is advised. Lesniewicz claims that *C. pisifera* 'Plumosa,' *C. pisifera* 'Nana Aurea,' and *C. pisifera* 'Squarrosa' can be grown indoors, in a bright, airy location away from any heat sources.

**Watering:** Touchy. Many varieties, especially Boulevard/blue moss cypress, are very vulnerable to root rot. However, unlike most genera that like it dry, false-cypresses tend to drink a lot of water, especially when in an active growth phase. And *Chamaecyparis* can never be allowed to dry out completely. Also, drying winds can cause foliage die-back. The best strategy is to use very fast-draining soil, water moderately, allow it to dry somewhat between waterings, and supplement watering with frequent misting. Also, an older couple in the Buffalo Bonsai Society with some very nice *Chamaecyparis* advised me to water only in the morning to early afternoon, to avoid having the trees stand in water overnight.

**Feeding:** Every two weeks, from early spring to midautumn. Use Miracid, as *Chamaecyparis* is a lime-hater. An extra tip from Brent: for blue varieties (*Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Boulevard', *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Minima Glauca') water occasionally with 1 teaspoon/gallon epsom salts. This will provide added magnesium which turns the foliage an intense blue.

**Pruning and wiring:** The major styling challenge for false cypress is the fatal combination of rapid growth, die-back from lack of light, and refusal to bud on old wood. If *Chamaecyparis* isn't pruned constantly, inside and lower branches will die and never grow back, making bonsai maintenance a

headache. The tree is best shaped through constant pinching of new foliage - never use scissors to prune as foliage browns where cut. Hinoki cypress also tends to form awkward whorls of foliage if not properly pruned. There is an excellent article by Kamajiro Yamada in *International Bonsai* 1995/No. 3 which gives detailed instructions accompanied with photographs of how to do this. Most false cypresses are easy to wire, but branches may take a while to set and may need to be re-wired several times to avoid cutting in to the tree. Can be wired at any time of year, but as wiring seems to sap the vigor of the plant, it is best to wait three months after repotting to wire.

**Propagation:** Cuttings can be taken from young wood in July or August. Hinoki cypress cuttings will root readily. Can be grown from seed, but needs cold pre-treatment and may take up to a year to germinate. Veneer grafting can be used on Hinoki cypress in summer.

**Repotting:** Every two to four years in early to mid spring for young trees, every three to five years for older ones. Your soil mix will depend on your conditions: fast-draining is the best idea for most people, but a richer mix might be preferable in extremely hot areas to keep the roots from drying completely. Hinoki cypress roots easily, and may need to be repotted every second year, removing as much as 1/3 to 1/2 of the root mass. Avoid using pots which are too large, especially with Boulevard cypress, as this keeps them too wet.

**Pests and diseases:** **Pests:** Juniper scale can be controlled by applying pesticides when the crawlers are active. The bagworm webs dead foliage and other debris together to make a nest. The covering makes the insect difficult to control. The nests can be picked off by hand. **Diseases:** Blight can be a problem on young plants in nurseries or old plants in landscape situations. In young plants, branch tips turn brown and die back until the whole branch or young tree is killed. Trees over five years old are less susceptible. When older trees in landscapes are affected by tip blight, entire trees are seldom killed. Tip blight can infect trees during wet weather. The disease causes sooty pustules on the leaves, bark and cones. Scorch may look like a disease but is caused by excessive direct sun, freezing stress, drought or mites.

### **Some species suitable for bonsai:**

- *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*: Lawson cypress, Port Orford cedar - neither a cedar nor a cypress, it is hardy in zones 6-8. Reddish brown bark and bright green foliage with purplish brown cones. There are several hundred cultivars of this species.
- *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Ellwoodii Improved': Ellwood cypress - a slow-growing, bluish shrub with small, tight foliage.
- *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Minima Aurea': A dwarf cultivar of Port Orford cedar with yellow-green young foliage.
- *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Minima Glauca' - A blue dwarf cv. of Port Orford cedar.
- *Chamaecyparis nootkatensi*: Nootka cypress - Brownish-grey bark and thick, dark green, drooping foliage. The *Chamaecyparis* of choice in cold climates, Thomas claims it is hardy in zones 5-7, while Mitchell says it's native as far north as Anchorage, Alaska.
- *Chamaecyparis obtusa*: Hinoki cypress - supposedly hardy in zones 5-8, but Brent says to -10F and I'd tend to believe him. Has reddish brown bark and dark green, fanlike foliage. Hinoki cypress foliage turns reddish in the winter.
- *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Blue Feathers' - very fine, aqua green foliage,

- more similar to Sawara than Hinoki cypress.
- *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Filicoides': fernspray cypress.
- *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Kamaeni Hiba' - a lovely little false cypress, with graceful foliage like ocean spray, tipped with yellow.
- *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Kosteri': Koster cypress.
- *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Nana': dwarf Hinoki cypress, dwarf Japanese false cypress.
- *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Nana Gracilis': Hinoki cypress - Hardy to zone 5. Immature foliage is bright yellow.
- *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Yatsubusa': Hinoki cypress .
- *Chamaecyparis pendula* - Has long, threadlike foliage, similar to mature juniper foliage. Young growth is tipped yellow- green.
- *Chamaecyparis pisifera*: Sawara cypress - supposedly hardy in zones 5-8, but I'd stick with -10F. It has reddish-brown bark and pointy foliage reminiscent of young junipers, which make it easier to style than other *Chamaecyparis* varieites. Note, however, that the foliage shape on *C. pisifera* cultivars varies greatly.
- *Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Boulevard' (often called *C. pisifera* 'Cyano Veridis' which is technically incorrect): Boulevard cypress, blue moss cypress - grows more slowly than other false cypresses. Has a graceful, arching habit and soft, blue foliage.
- *Chamaecyparis pisifera compacta* 'white' - a dwarf Sawara cypress with distinctly ivory tipped fronds.
- *Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Filifera': threadbranch cypress - has drooping, threadlike branches.
- *Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Nana Aurea': Sawara cypress.
- *Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Plumosa': Sawara cypress - light green, feathery foliage.
- *Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Snow': Sawara cypress - Fast growing, with green to yellow foliage.
- *Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'squarrosa': Sawara cypress.
- *Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Tsukumo' - Soft, dark green foliage, more like Hinoki or Shimpaku juniper than Sawara cypress.
- *Chamaecyparis thyoides* 'Andelyensis Conica': Andelyensis Conica cypress, Andelyensis white cedar. Zones 5-8. A dense cone of blue-green foliage.
- *Chamaecyparis thyoides* 'Heatherbun'.

### **Bibliography:**

Jahn (ed.) "The Simon and Schuster Guide to Bonsai"

Lesniewicz's "Bonsai in Your Home"

Owen's "Bonsai Identifier"

Resnick's "Bonsai"

Samson's "Creative Art of Bonsai"

Tomlinson's "Complete Book of Bonsai"

Information on individual species is from Mitchell's "American Nature Guides: Trees," and Thomas (ed.) "The Hearst Garden Guide to Trees and Shrubs"

Issue 3, 1995 International Bonsai, "The Culture & Styling of Hinoki Cypress Bonsai" by Kamajiro Yamada, and "Creating False-Cypress Bonsai" by Shinji Ogasawara are excellent sources for styling help.

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