

Tree of the Month, April & May 2013: Deodar cedar (*Cedrus deodara*)

The deodar cedar is an evergreen conifer in the genus *Cedrus* - the true cedars. In the Pacific Northwest, we are more familiar with the western redcedar (*Thuja plicata*), a scale-leaved false "cedar". The deodar cedar is native to the Himalayas, from Eastern Afghanistan to Western Nepal, and is the national tree of Pakistan. *Cedrus deodara* has blue-green needles that are longer than those of the Mediterranean cedars (*Cedrus libani* and *Cedrus atlantica*). From a distance, its drooping branches appear soft and feathery, but be warned, they are actually quite prickly when touched.

The common name "deodar" and botanical name "*deodara*" come from the Sanskrit word "*devadāru*", which means "divine wood". In India, deodar cedar oil has long been used in traditional Ayurvedic medicine for treating bronchitis, arthritis, and ulcers. It is also used as an incense, disinfectant and insect repellent. Researchers have studied the oil and found evidence of anti-inflammatory and anti-fungal properties.

Cedrus deodara was named and introduced to cultivation in 1831 by Scottish botanist David Don and his brother George. Deodar cedar wood is resistant to water and rot, so in the mid-1800's an attempt was made to farm the trees for commercial lumber. Unfortunately, the British climate was not suitable for producing trees of the needed height, so the trees were marketed as ornamentals.

There are many old deodar cedars in the parks and private gardens of Vancouver. Some were planted as street trees, which was a bad idea because these cedars spread out when given the space. Mature specimens often have crowns that reach 15 meters across, encroaching on streets and power lines, and must have their limbs removed by city arborists.

There are several deodar cedars at VanDusen, but the nicest specimens can be found in the Sino-Himalayan Garden or in the Great Lawn near the "Throne of Nezahualcoyotl", a sculpture by Mexican artist Sebastián.