

## **Tree of the Month, August 2015:** **Cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*)**

Cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*), the stately conifer featured on the Lebanese flag, has been treasured by the cultures of the eastern Mediterranean since ancient times. Native to the mountains of Lebanon, Syria and Turkey, this tree can reach 40 m in height, with wide spreading branches and a trunk up to 2.5 m wide, and can live for over 1000 years. Its fragrant, durable wood has long been popular for ship-making and constructing grand buildings like palaces and temples. Egyptians began trading for the wood as early as 3000 BCE, and Cedar of Lebanon is referenced in the Sumerian “Epic of Gilgamesh” and The Bible.

Today *Cedrus libani* is an important cultural emblem for Lebanon; aside from appearing on the flag and coat of arms, it is used by companies, organizations, political parties and social movements. Cedar of Lebanon was the namesake of the Cedar Revolution of 2005, in which Lebanese citizens protested the influence of Syrian interests on their government in their capital, Beirut, and demanded the withdrawal of the Syrian troops that had occupied their country since 1976.

Cedar of Lebanon is listed as “vulnerable” on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Endangered Species. In Lebanon and Syria, it occurs in scattered mountain groves, many in protected areas such as the Qadisha Valley UNESCO World Heritage Site in northern Lebanon. The biggest population is found in the Taurus Mountains of southern Turkey, where replanting projects are underway.

Species in the genus *Cedrus*, known as the “true cedars”, are geographically divided between Mediterranean (*Cedrus libani* in Asia Minor, *C. atlantica* in northwestern Africa, and *C. brevifolia* in Cyprus) and Himalayan (*Cedrus deodara*) branches. Some botanists argue that the differences between the Mediterranean species are minor and they should all be lumped together as varieties of *Cedrus libani*. Because of this ongoing disagreement, some books and websites list Cedar of Lebanon as *Cedrus libani* var. *libani*.

Cedar of Lebanon has green to blue-green needles in bundles of 30-40 on short spur shoots or singly on young long shoots. The egg-shaped cones are 5-12 cm long and are green when they first appear in mid-late summer, turning brown as they ripen in autumn.