

Hughie Jones December 2022

Chilean cedar (*Austrocedrus chilensis*)
Cypress family - *Cupressaceae*



Chilean cedar (*Austrocedrus chilensis*) is the only species in its genus. A beautiful medium-sized conifer, it has a pyramid shape and can live up to 1,500 years. Chilean cedar is native to the Valdivian temperate rain forests and the adjacent drier steppe-forests of central-southern Chile and western Argentina. It is found in the evergreen mountain forests of the Andes, usually on drier sites within the rainforest. This cedar often occurs in pure stands on rocky outcrops where other species cannot grow. Its extensive root system helps to anchor it on dry slopes.

The scale-like leaves of Chilean cedar are a blue-green colour and have a prominent white stomatal strip along the outer edge. Its bark is a shaggy brown. Chilean cedar is dioecious: the male and female cones are on separate trees. Our one and only *Austrocedrus chilensis* in VanDusen is a female and was planted in 1999. You can find it in bed 59 in the Southern Hemisphere Garden.



One thing that is a concern for this cedar today is the tree plantations of non-native species (Douglas fir, ponderosa pine, and shore pine). These plantations began in the 1970s and now occupy areas where *Austrocedrus* naturally occurs. Another concern is that *Austrocedrus* is being affected by an introduced pathogen called cypress sickness (*Phytophthora austrocedrae*). Cypress sickness is a disease of the roots that particularly affects stands growing in poorly drained soil. Our native western cedar (*Thuja plicata*), once thought to be resistant to this pathogen, has been affected lately.

But Chilean cedar is a survivor. Highly proficient in nitrogen conservation, it is able to minimize losses in nitrogen wherever it grows. That gives it the ability to dominate nutrient-poor sites and also helps to explain its wide ecological range. Its tree history goes way back to when most of the Southern Hemisphere was one continent called Gondwana. A good sign for its future.



The pictures are of our VanDusen Austrocedrus chilensis in fall.

<https://threatenedconifers.rbge.org.uk/conifers/austrocedrus-chilensis>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valdivian_temperate_rain_forest

<https://www.conifers.org/cu/Austrocedrus.php>

<https://treesandshrubsonline.org/articles/austrocedrus/austrocedrus-chilensis/>

<https://www.conifers.org/topics/phytophthora.php>