

Himalayan cedar or deodar
***Cedrus deodara* – national tree of Pakistan**

It is not surprising that this majestic conifer from the Himalayas is worshipped as a divine tree. Its species name comes from the Sanskrit term *devadar*. *Deva* means god and *daru* is wood.

Forests full of these cedars were the favourite living place of ancient Indian sages. Hindu epics regularly mention *Darukavan*, meaning a forest of deodars as a sacred place.

You can distinguish the deodar cedar or Himalayan cedar from other cedars by its graceful drooping branches. Lower branches usually remain on the tree as it ages. Those of the Atlas grow upwards, while the branches of the Lebanon are horizontal. Of the two, Himalayan cedar is more like the Atlas as it has one main trunk and is usually conical in shape. This is in contrast to the Lebanon. Its trunk splits into many large branches, giving it a distinctive flat-topped appearance.

In the Himalayas, deodar cedar starts at an altitude of 1,500 m and grows right up to an altitude of 3,000 m or more. In VanDusen Botanical Garden, this tree is spread out through the Sino Himalayan Garden and is especially effective going up the height of the waterfall. It stays healthy throughout the seasons, unlike the other cedar species which dislike the hotter summer weather.

Being a high altitude tree and occurring in more isolated areas meant this tree was not easily accessible to logging. It did not suffer the fate of the cedar of Lebanon, which is the first case of deforestation in recorded history. This cedar used to grow around the Mediterranean. Its strong timber was essential for the fleets of Mesopotamia, Phoenicia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome. The cedar of Lebanon became as essential as oil is today. The great forests disappeared long ago, and this cedar is now close to extinction in Lebanon.

All trees in the genus *Cedrus* have needle-like leaves arranged in rosettes on shoots. The deodar cedar produces flowers less frequently than other cedars, and cones are often only seen on branches or trees with no males.

The male flowers are cylindrical buds that sit upright on branches and change from green through pink to purple before shedding their pollen at the end of October. The male cones are 6 cm long. The female flowers are pale green to begin with before turning brown and becoming barrel-shaped woody cones. These grow up to 12.5 cm in length. They take a year to mature. Then they disintegrate, shedding their seeds and leaving a central spike on the branch.

Cedrus deodara has strong, durable and fragrantly scented wood. With its religious associations, it is used for construction in temples and palaces. It is also rot-resistant, and in everyday life is good for bridges and railway sleepers. Let's hope its divine name keeps protecting this conifer of the gods.



male flowers of *Cedrus deodara*

Sources:

Observation on Design, Plant Collections and Construction – R. Forster; For the Love of Trees – Roy Forster; Trees of North America – Roger Phillips;
http://apps.kew.org/trees/?page_id=149;
<http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder>