

DAWN REDWOOD

In 1941, fossils revealed a new conifer, dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*), which was thought to be extinct. Just a few years later, botanists were surprised to identify a living specimen in a village shrine in Hubei, China where the residents call it shui-sha (水杉), which means “water fir”.

When dinosaurs roamed the Earth in the late Cretaceous, *Metasequoia* forests covered the Northern Hemisphere, including Canada. **Today, fewer than 5,000 wild trees of this “living fossil” remain, but this is an endangered species with a happy ending.** Dawn redwood forests are being re-established in China and seeds have been shared around the world. Today dawn redwood is a popular ornamental tree and is protected in arboreta and botanical gardens like VanDusen.

This tree has armpits! Dawn redwood is easy to recognize by its feathery deciduous leaves and armpit-like depressions beneath each branch. Visit VanDusen’s Meconopsis Dell to see them up close!

Cypress Family – Cupressaceae | Conservation status: Endangered



Fossil of *Metasequoia heerii*, extinct relative of dawn redwood. Photo by Ghedoghedo, Wikimedia Commons.

Colourful fall foliage of dawn redwood near Shangri-La, Yunnan, China.



Fall foliage of dawn redwood trees near Shangri-La, Yunnan, China.