

SWAMP CYPRESS



As your boat drifts quietly between tree trunks emerging from the waters of Florida's cypress swamps, the humid air buzzes with insects, bird calls and the splash of a creature lurking below the surface. A ripple appears at the side of your boat. Is it water dripping from a phantom orchid in the branches above? Or a water snake or alligator? **Can you spot the alligator in the photo below?**

Skip the mosquito bites and visit VanDusen's R. Roy Forster Cypress Pond. **Try not to trip over the quirky "cypress knees" or pneumatophores that jut up around the trunks and along the shore.** The role of these specialized roots is hotly debated with theories suggesting their purpose is to aerate submerged roots, store carbohydrates and stabilize the tree in soggy soils. In fall, these deciduous conifers turn bronze before they drop their needles and become "bald" for winter.

Living for up to 600 years, swamp cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) grows to 50 metres (160 feet) tall in swamps and wetlands of the southeastern United States. There they host epiphytes or "air plants" in their branches, provide seeds for wild turkeys and waterfowl, and breeding habitat for frogs, salamanders and catfish.

Cypress Family – Cupressaceae | Conservation status: Least Concern



Cypress "knees" or pneumatophores.



Bald cypress swamp in Florida, USA.