

Western Red Cedar – submitted by Peter Maarsman



**One of the questions we get asked is, “What is the official tree of British Columbia?”**

**Answer: It is the Western Red Cedar and it will grow for 1,000 years.**

The Western Red Cedar frequently grows along with Western Hemlock and Douglas Fir. On the North Coast, it also grows with Amabilis Fir and Spruces. These forests usually have a lush layer of ferns, huckleberries and Devil’s Club, with a thick carpet of mosses on the forest floor. Something like Green Timbers Forest. It grows best in moist to wet soils, with lots of nutrients. It is tolerant of shade and long lived. It is a large tree, up to 60 metres tall when mature, with drooping branches; the trunk often spreads widely at the base, up to 4 metres.

The Western Red Cedar has scale-like leaves, opposite pairs, in four rows, folded in one pair but not in the other and overlapping like shingles. Arranged on the twigs in flat, fan-like sprays. You may notice the very strong aroma.

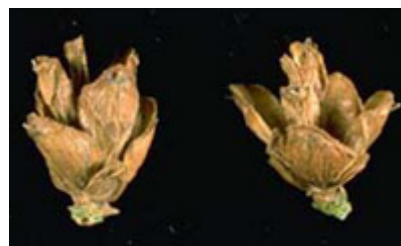
The seed cones are egg-shaped, only one centimeter long, with several pairs of scales. Pollen cones are small and reddish.

The bark is grey, stringy, tearing off in long strips on mature trees.

The Western Red Cedar typically occurs at low to mid elevations along the coast and in the wet belt of the interior, where the climate is cool, mild, and moist.

It has been called “the cornerstone of Northwest Coast aboriginal culture” and has great spiritual significance. Coastal people used all parts of the tree. They used the wood for dugout canoes, house planks, bentwood boxes, clothing and many tools such as arrow shafts, masks, and paddles. The inner bark made rope, clothing and baskets. The long arching branches were twisted into rope and baskets. It was also used for many medicines.

The wood is naturally durable and light in weight. It is used for house siding and interior paneling as well as outdoor furniture, decking and fencing. Because of its resistance to decay and insect damage, the wood of large, fallen trees remain sound for over 100 years. Even after 100 years, the wood can be salvaged and cut into shakes for roofs. The Western Red Cedar is named *plicata* which comes from a Greek word meaning “folded in plaits,” in reference to the arrangement of the leaves. It is sometimes called *arbor-vitae*, Latin for “tree of life.”



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**Green Timbers Heritage Society** hosts the SNAP Forestry Student Summer Projects each year to help maintain our Surrey Forests. The students remove invasive species, plant trees, clear trails and streams, repair bridges. Please join us so we can do more! Only \$5 for one year membership. Mail to 14255 – 96 Ave, Surrey, V3V 7Z2.