

October 14, 2019

## Bald Cypress Beauty

By Lydia Holley, Master Gardener



One of the prettiest trees in my garden in fall is the bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*). A conifer with an attitude, the bald cypress has delicate leaves that turn a bright copper color in autumn. In winter, it shrugs off its leaves, leaving a bare skeleton. Its deciduous nature gives this tree the “bald” portion of its name. Most conifers are not deciduous, so for the first few years, I held my breath waiting for my tree’s leaves to return in spring. Now I appreciate the tree’s ever-changing look.

This tree has the ability to grow “knees” which are specialized roots that help transport air if the tree is growing in standing water. Cypresses grown in well-draining soil

do not develop these knees.

Bald cypress is a Texas native. It can grow up to 75 feet tall, with a few reported to reach 120 feet. If that seems a bit too tall for your garden, there are dwarf cultivars available which will stay to around 10 ft tall. There is even a weeping cultivar, which would make an unusual specimen tree.

Cypress wood has traditionally been valued for its resistance to decay. It has been used for making furniture, houses, tools, boats, docks, and other construction. Cypress wood is not usually harvested now, however, due to the tree’s slow-growing nature.

If you have a low spot that collects rain, making it hard to grow other plants, you may wish to consider placing a bald cypress there. Or you may wish to place it elsewhere. But, once you have planted a bald cypress, it will probably outlive you. It is not unusual for bald cypress trees to live to 600 years of age, with several trees known to have lived over twice that age.

If you have been lamenting Texas' lack of colored foliage in fall, plant a stand of bald cypresses. Their feathery needles will turn striking shades of orange and gold, which will not disappoint.

*For more information, call 903-675-6130, email [hendersonCMGA@gmail.com](mailto:hendersonCMGA@gmail.com), or visit [txmq.org/hendersonmq](http://txmq.org/hendersonmq).*