

# Maine Tree Species Fact Sheet

**Common Name:** Northern White Cedar (Eastern or American Arborvitae)

**Botanical Name:** *Thuja occidentalis*



<http://www.conifers.org/cu/th/occidentalis3.gif>

## **Physical Description:**

**Growth Habit:** Northern white cedar is a long-lived, slow-growing, tree with reddish-brown bark that is often tinged with orange. The bark has shallow fissures, which divide it into flat narrow ridges. The leaves are scale-like, about 1/2" long, abruptly pointed, bright above and pale green below, emitting a tansy-like odor when bruised. The small branches are flat in shape.

**Height:** Northern white cedar reaches a height of 40-60 feet with a 10-15 foot spread.

**Shape:** Northern white cedar is a dense, often broad-pyramidal tree with short ascending branches to the ground which end in flat, spreading, horizontal sprays. Usually there is one trunk, but multiple trunks do occur.

## **Fruit/Seed Description/Dispersal Methods:**

The cones are erect, small, about 1/2" long, with only a few pairs of scales. They mature in one season. The seed is small and winged.

## **Range within Maine:**

Northern white cedar is generally found in swamps, along streams, mountain slopes and old pastures where the soil is moist. Dense stands are widely distributed statewide. It is most abundant in eastern and northern Maine, and grows best on alkaline soils. This tree is hardy to Zone 3.

## **Distinguishing Features:**

Northern white cedar has short, ascending branches to the ground, which end in flat, spreading, horizontal sprays. The reddish-brown bark is often tinged with orange and has shallow fissures, which divide into flat narrow ridges.

## **Interesting Features:**

Northern white cedar leaf oil is distilled from boughs and used for perfume and medicines. The foliage is rich in vitamin C. Native American and early European explorers used it to treat scurvy.

The wood is soft and light, coarse-grained, brittle, has very durable heartwood and a fragrant odor. It is used primarily for shingles, poles, posts, boxes, crates and boats. It is naturally weather-resistant, self-preserving and is also used for decks and outdoor furniture. White cedar is a good alternative to pressure treated wood.

## **Relationship to Wildlife:**

Northern white cedar is one of the best winter browse species for White-tailed deer. Snowshoe hares and porcupine also browse the foliage. Deer, moose, black bear and many species of birds use the Northern white cedar for shelter. Pileated woodpeckers feed on the carpenter ants that, in turn, nest in and feed on the heartwood.

## **Landscape Use:**

This species is useful as a specimen or accent tree, it is good for hedges and commonly used as a foundation plant.

## **Common Problems or Pests of the Tree in Maine:**

Northern white cedar is subject to bagworm, heart rot, leaf miner, spider mites, carpenter ants and deer browsing.

## **References:**

*Forest Trees of Maine, Twelfth Edition.* Maine Forest Service/Department of Conservation. 1995.

*Manual of Woody Landscape Plants, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition.* Dirr, Michael A. Publishing L.L.C. 1998.

*United States Dept. of Agriculture: Silvics of North America*  
<http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/tree/thuocc/all.html>



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