Oregon Sea Grant Extension
Sustainable Tourism &
Outdoor Recreation Program

Interpretative Fact Sheet
Western Redcedar
(*Thuja plicata*)

The following short article is from the *Oregon Coast 101 Species* collection used by the Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional (GORP) training program. These articles are intended to provide interesting facts you can share with your clientele and add value to your services.

An Interpretive Fact Sheet has been written about each species. We are currently uploading these blogs and creating the links.

Come visit us!

Tourism and Business Development College of Business,
Oregon State University Extension - Oregon Sea Grant at
http://tourism.oregonstate.edu/

Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional Program
https://www.GORPguide.org

For more information about the GORP training program see:
https://www.gorpguide.org/become-a-gorp-certified-guide

Western Red Cedar (Thuja plicata)

tourism.oregonstate.edu/western-red-cedar-thuja-plicata/

By colliek2 August 28, 2020

Have you ever watched the television program "Maine Cabin Masters"? It features a small group of friends that restore old cabins in Maine. They often refer to and use cedar during their restorations and provide interesting tidbits about the wood.

Western Redcedar branches (royalty free photo from Unsplashed)

The cedar featured in "Maine Cabin Masters" is Northern White or Eastern White cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) which is in the same Cypress family as our native Western Red Cedar. Neither tree is a true cedar. But, both are similar, were important cornerstones for

indigenous peoples, and are still in use today.

Identification

Two easy ways to identify this evergreen is by its relatively thin, waxy sprays of scale-like leaves. Leaves form in opposite pairs at 90 degree angles to each other creating a spray. The sprays are green on top and slightly whitish below and can ultimately form a large drooping spray.

Older branches are strongly aromatic. Like other evergreens, cedars create volatile oils to protect itself from pests. Branches are very flexible and have good tensile strength. Native Americans would use the branches to create strong cords, fishing line, twine, rope, particularly in situations where other materials might fray.

Cones are generally tiny and insignificant.

The bark is thick, spongy and fibrous. The bark forms long dark reddish-brown vertical clumps. A strip of the bark can be safely removed without harming the tree certain times of the year.

From a distance

Even from a distance, these trees are very large. Western Redcedars are generally larger than its eastern cousin ranging upwards of 230 feet with a trunk diameter up to about 23 feet. The tallest living Western Red Cedar is 195 feet and is near Lake Quinault, Washington).

Both species live a long time. The oldest verified Western Red is older than 1460 years. The oldest Eastern white exceeds 1,653 years. Even though younger trees are sensitive to fire, older and larger cedars are more resistant. Stands will regenerate fairly quickly from seed.

Habitat

Cedars do well along the Pacific Coast. They thrive in moist, temperate environments, and will tolerate a wide variety of soil types including that with limestone, or moderately alkaline, to the commonly found highly acidic soils.

Like other trees, too much water (like flooding) is not a good thing and can lead to pest and disease problems. Water saplings the first couple of years as the roots develop.

Uses

Cedar was and continues to be an important resource. Native Americans referred to the species as “long life maker” in reference to the many ways that they used the tree. Some tribes referred to themselves as “people of the redcedar” because of their necessity.

Some products created by Native Americans include:

- canoes, kayaks, paddles
- Homes, roofs, mats
- boxes, arrows, rope, cords, rings
- masks, totem poles, ceremonial objects
- vessels, baskets and bowls
- clothing (capes, skirts, dresses)
- medicine and soap

More recently, cedar has been used to make:

- Shingles, siding, decking,
- Paper, industrial boxes,
- Fencing, outdoor furniture, and utility poles
- Sail boats and kayaks,
- Holiday wreathes

Cedar leaf oil is used in perfumes, soaps, deodorants, and insecticides. This oil is what makes the wood less susceptible to decay or insect damage.

Wildlife

Cedars provide cover and nesting areas for many birds, such as swallows and chickadees, and mammals. In the wild, large trees can provide cover for bears, raccoons, skunks. Deer will also consume small saplings and seedlings.

Note: Thujaplicin is the chemical substance that serves as a natural fungicide. Thujaplicin is only found in older trees and will persist in dead wood for years. Some woodworkers and loggers become sensitive and allergic to cedar. Adverse reactions to red cedar dust include asthma, reduction of lung function, and eye irritations.

REFERENCES:
–USDA NRCS Plant Guide, Western Red Cedar (https://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/cs_thpl.pdf)
–SFGate, “Disadvantages of Wester Redcedar“ (https://homeguides.sfgate.com/disadvantages-western-red-cedars-24366.html)
–Wikipedia, *Thuja plicata* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thuja_plicata)
–Main Cabin Masters (https://mainecabinmasters.com/)