

Baldcypress, its not just for wetlands

Over the past several months, I've written about all kinds of native plants. On January 9th, all of the plant varieties that have been covered in these articles will be available for free. All you need to do is bring in at least one bag of air potato bulbs and exchange it for a plant. Don't forget that there will also be very nice prizes for the biggest, smallest, most unique and most (by pounds) for the air potato bulbs. You don't even need to get out of your car for the exchange process. Just drop by the bag and tell us what kind of plant you want and we'll load it for you!

One of the many varieties of plants that will be available on January 9th, will be the baldcypress tree. Known primarily in the south for its massive buttressed trunks and tremendous height, baldcypress trees are extremely attractive and easy to care for. Although these trees are generally associated with wet areas, cypress trees can also be grown in dry locations. They make attractive shade trees and provide shelter and food for many species of wildlife. If planted in dry locations however, the knees that are associated with the tree will most likely not be seen since they serve as root projections that would rise above the water's surface.

Baldcypress can be clipped into a hedge or allowed to grow normally to provide a vertical accent to landscapes. It is also an excellent choice for street trees. The roots do not lift sidewalks and curbs as readily as some other species of trees. Its delicate, feathery foliage allows light, dappled shade. In addition, the heartwood of the tree is somewhat resistant to rot.

Even though the tree is ideal for wet locations because of its unique root system, it can grow almost anywhere. It is not picky about soil type and will survive in most soils unless they are heavy alkaline above a pH of 7.5. The tree requires little maintenance and usually grows straight without a lot of curvature of the trunk. It does not put on leaders and is a great choice for areas where a tall, vertical, pyramid shaped tree is desired.

Baldcypress can grow to be over 100 feet tall and can live for 600 years. They provide a valuable source of food and cover for wildlife. Wild turkey, wood ducks, evening grosbeak, squirrels and Canadian geese migrating south, feed on the seeds. Swamp rabbits and birds, such as Florida cranes and ducks also feed on parts of the tree. White-tailed deer escape to the cover the baldcypress provides. The branches provide nesting places for bald eagles and osprey. The knees, when rotted out, provide nesting habitat for warblers. Catfish spawn beneath the fallen logs and many other critters find shelter in and around the base of the larger trees. When in the wild, baldcypress also diffuse and slow floodwaters, which reduces flood damage. They also trap sediments and pollutants in the wetlands they live in.

The fruit of the tree is a round cone that is about ¾" to 1" in diameter. The cones appear wrinkled, green and leathery. Once mature, the cones become woody. The needle-like leaves of the tree grow individually from the twig. They appear soft and feathery and are dull light green with a white underside. The tree is deciduous, thus its name "bald" for the appearance it gives in the winter months. Before the needles are shed, they turn a brilliant coppery red. The bark appears brown turning to gray with scaly ridges that peel off in strips, leaving an interesting look during the winter.

Baldcypress are members of the Redwood family. They bud in late December and generally bloom in the spring. Pollen is released when the flowers bloom. Seeds are produced inside the female cone, which can produce anywhere from 2 to 34 seeds.

Whether you want a shrub, flowering plant, groundcover or tree, we will have something to offer on January 9th. Mark your calendars and bring in your bag of air potato bulbs to the Ag Center for your free plant. To find out more about the event, call (863) 402-6545.