

Cypress Tree



While there are different kinds of cypress trees, the one most common to Florida is the Bald Cypress, which grows all the way from Delaware to Texas. Florida's cypress trees are not currently endangered or threatened. Nonetheless, the huge, ancient trees (some thousands of years old) that William Bartram would have seen in his travels through Florida, or even those that Small viewed while collecting his plant specimens, are no longer in existence. Cypress wood is very beautiful as well as useful, and during the late 19th and early 20th century widespread logging came close to making their survival uncertain. Since then, cypress logging has come under some government control, so cypress trees can be seen near many human communities, as well as in the wild.

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Cypress trees can grow as tall as 150 feet and almost 10 feet around. They are very important wetland plants, because they are often the basis for "tree islands," which are small forests in wetlands like the Everglades. Tree islands provide places for mammals and birds to eat, sleep, and breed. Perhaps the most interesting thing about cypress trees is the "knees" that are part of the cypress tree's root system, jutting out of the water near the base of the tree (see photo above). Scientists think that these knees help the trees to get the air that they need when the rest of the root system is underwater.

Cypress wood is very valued for its beauty, and for its resistance to termites and to rot. In addition, the bark of cypress trees is made into a very popular mulch. This mulch's termite and rot resistance qualities make it a very practical, as well as attractive, addition to gardens. Cypress trees are under indirect protection, as the habitats that they help to create are often found in parks and preserves that are protected. However, if the use of cypress trees for mulch continues uncontrolled, it will threaten the survival of other healthy cypress tree populations.

Questions

1. What have you learned about cypress trees?
2. Do you think cypress trees need to be "rescued"? Why or why not?
3. How would you represent what you have learned about the cypress tree in an art work?