

# Cedar of Lebanon

*Cedrus libani*

By *Tilda Mims*

Information Specialist, Alabama Forestry Commission

**C**edar of Lebanon, *Cedrus libani*, the most famous conifer of western Asiatic origin, is a member of the pine family (*Pinaceae*).

A native of Asia Minor and Syria, it is well known for scriptural and historical origins and is undoubtedly one of the earliest trees planted by man. The Bible tells us that King Solomon transplanted cedars from Lebanon into the plains of Palestine.

The fragrance, beauty, and remarkable durability of this tree made it a favorite for construction of ancient civilizations. The Tower of David and the temple in Jerusalem initiated by King David and completed by his son, King Solomon, was built of "wood of cedar without number" cut from the mountains of what is now Lebanon. The Bible makes more than 50 references to Cedars of Lebanon.

The tree was the basis of numerous economies for ancient civilizations where it was used for construction of temples, palaces, and boats. Export of cedar wood to Egypt was an important factor in the growth of Phoenician prosperity and provided capital to launch enterprises in international trading, navigation, and arts and crafts.

Egyptians used cedar sawdust for mummification. Cedar resin, which makes



wood decay-resistant, was used in embalming and to coat coffins and

papyrus to preserve them for the afterlife. The pitch of cedar was used to ease the pain of toothaches and its sawdust was thought to repel snakes, making shade of a cedar a relatively safe place to sleep.

Phoenicians and Egyptians were not alone in using cedar. The Assyrians, Nebuchadrezzar, the Romans, the King of Babylon, Herod the Great, and the Turks in the Ottoman Empire all exploited cedars. During World War I (1914-1918), most remaining stands were used for railroad fuel. Consequently, the Cedar of Lebanon has dramatically declined in its native range to only 12 stands, a total of slightly more than 4,000 acres.

A grand tree that requires lots of space to spread fully, it may reach 80-140 feet in height and a trunk 4-8 feet in diameter. The shape is pyramidal when young, but trees develop huge horizontal branches and a flattened top with age. The attractive dark green foliage persists for two to three years. Fruiting cones, which take two or three years to mature, are oval to oblong. On average, trees do not bear cones until they are 40 or 50 years old.

The Alabama Champion Cedar of Lebanon is in Lamar County. It is 125 inches in circumference and 61 feet tall, with a 61.75 feet crown spread. 🌲



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