

## Tree Profile: Swamp Cypress—*Taxodium distichum*

**General information:** The Swamp Cypress or Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) is native to the south eastern United States. It is a deciduous conifer which is hardy and tough, adapting to a wide range of soil types, whether wet, salty, dry, or swampy. It is noted for the russet-re autumn colour of its lacy leaves/needles. The heartwood and roots are rot-resistant.

**Position:** Full sun.

**Watering:** It is vital for the health of the tree that its roots stay moist constantly. Use a soil mix that retains water.

**Feeding:** Use your normal bonsai feeding regime during the growing period.

**Repotting:** During dormancy in winter. A soil mix of at least 80% organic matter and 20% inorganic material is recommended, although they will happily exist in any mix provided that it does not dry out. Slightly acidic soil is preferred – pH range of 5.5 to 6.8.

**Pruning & Wiring:** Bud pinching – pinching new growth reduces leaf size and promotes back budding. Elongating shoots can also have a few cm trimmed off if they are getting too long or thick. The pinched leaves will fill in the space where the tip was removed, but they will not continue to elongate.

Pruning – Prune only when vascular tissue has been established, otherwise the shoot will die back over winter. It is safe to prune after a new shoot has changed colour from green through pale pink to reddish rust colour. Once this colour is reached, it is safe to prune. On most trees, prune back once per growing season, around the start of December. The only other time to prune is during dormancy in winter.

Wire during winter.

**Styles:** Formal Upright, Informal Upright, Slanting, Group/Forest

**Propagation:** From seed, but cuttings also strike well.

**Pests and diseases:** Not prone to any particular pest or disease, but be vigilant and treat any infestations noted. Possums like the new foliage!

**Knees:** Swamp Cypress are known for having knees, which are woody projections from the root system that project above the ground or swamp water. The purpose is to provide oxygen to the roots. To develop knees on bonsai swamp cypress, the tree must be over 12 years old and the water table must be at the right depth in relation to the roots. To grow knees, place the pot in a water reservoir filled with water up to, but not above, the rim of the pot. The water level is maintained daily during the wet season (summer). Once the dry season arrives, remove the pot from the water reservoir. Knees can take 2-3 years to develop, though they can develop in one year. Note that this procedure must be followed every year after knees have developed, or the knees may be lost.

Photos: 1—Growth habits, 2—foliage, 3—forest planting at the NBPCA, 4—knees in the wild.

Credits: Steve Wise from Canberra Bonsai Society, Randy Bennett on Bald Cypress Facebook page, Wikipedia for knee photo.

