

Fitzroya cupressoides - Growing Guide

Growing Fitzroya Cupressoides

Patagonian cypress

For many years Fitzroya cupressoides was one of the standout architectural small trees on the lawn at Burncoose where its trailing and drooping branches were a delight. Sadly it came to grief when a tree landed on it some 10 years ago.

Today this is a rare tree in the wild in Chile and southern Argentina. Excessive logging and deforestation for farming have greatly reduced its native range. In the UK Fitzroya makes a good feature conifer either as a tree or a large shrub in open woodland with wind protection.

This is a conifer with a Cornish connection too as it was one of the many new introductions to the British Isles made by the Cornishman William Lobb. This one in 1849. It may not have proved quite as popular as his Araucaria araucana which also comes from Chile but it was sold and propagated by Treseders nurseries in Truro through most of the 20th century.

Today we propagate this tree from cuttings taken in late summer but we have found seed setting even on small pot grown plants. The male cones have nine scales and are cylindrical in clusters. The female cones are solitary, spherical and pale brown. While the foliage may well confuse you into thinking that this is a juniper the seed cones are quite different. The plant growing at Caerhays produces both male and female cones but sometimes trees can be male or female.

In the wild this tree grows to 50ft but that seems unlikely in our wetter climate. In some maturity the bark peels in strips and is reddish brown. Personally the attraction is the drooping, branching habit where the branches trail almost to the ground.

The drooping habit of this tree means that it needs regular staking as a young plant to keep it upright. Exposure to strong winds can snap branches and cold east winds will cause scorching so hide it away where it receives as little of this as possible.



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