

Pilgerodendron - Growing Guide

Growing Pilgerodendron Uviferum

(Libocedrus uviferum)

This rare slow growing Chilean tree was first introduced to the UK in 1849 but it has only re-emerged as a desirable and more widely grown conifer in the last 20 years as a result of new seed collections from the wild. At Tregothnan gardens in Cornwall the lower end for their sunken Chilean garden is notable for the clump of erect upright 'soldiers' guarding the entrance. Some 20 years from planting these Pilgerodendron uvifera are today only about 15ft tall with a uniform spread or width from top to bottom of not much more than 3 or 4ft. The roadside entrance to a well-known public school in Oxfordshire has one of these acting as a similar pencil-shaped sentinel. It is doubtful if many parents or pupils know what it is.

So this is an attractive, architectural conifer which will reside happily in a smaller garden. It is still rare enough to puzzle most garden visitors and has proved perfectly hardy in UK gardens in a reasonably sheltered spot. At Caerhays it has grown well in a colder east facing location and, 10 years from planting, started to produce male and female flower cones as you can see in these photographs.

Pilgerodendron grow in coastal mountains in Chile and S. Argentina in acidic soil. They are also found on the margins of swamps and lakes. The Tregothnan plants are growing in a bog but a notable youngish clump at Wakehurst Place are on a well-drained south facing hillside overlooking the valley.

In maturity Pilgerodendron have attractive flaking or peeling bark with the branches held horizontally as they are in immature specimens. The 'leaves' have white bands on the inner surfaces.

We have yet to try to grow this conifer from cuttings ourselves but they are said to root fairly easily from semi-ripe wood in the summer. Seed is best sown in containers in a cold frame in spring.

Despite the current cost of these attractive and slow growing small trees it is very likely that it will fall as they become more popular and widely grown.



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