

Sequoiadendron giganteum - Growing Guide

Growing Sequoiadendron Giganteum

Wellingtonia, Giant redwood

This is a native of California where, although it does not grow as tall as *Sequoia sempervirens*, the coastal redwood, it is considered one of the oldest living plants in the world. In the Sierra Nevada the 'General Sherman' *Wellingtonia* has a height of 250ft and a girth of 75ft 4ft above ground level.

In the UK the tallest *Wellingtonia* is at Benmore in SW Scotland. Huge trees can be found in many of Britain's best known woodland gardens where they stand proud in the landscape or treeline. Now that Leonardslee Gardens are again open to the public there is a monster tree or two there. *Wellingtonias* are however far less of a feature of Cornish gardens than might be expected with monkey puzzles being far more common. There are no mature *S. giganteum* at Caerhays or Burncoose and historically there never have been.

Over the last 50 years I have tried to get them going at Caerhays in key locations where they would one day be visible from long distances. They have grown well initially but all came to grief in droughts or from honey fungus and have never looked comfortable or settled. I suspect that our high Cornish rainfall is not to their liking or perhaps I have tried them in too exposed a position. There are however good examples of mature trees at Tregrehan including the extraordinary *S. giganteum* 'Pendulum' whose long branches hang parallel to the trunk.

S. giganteum is a conical tree which becomes columnar with recurved branches in maturity and very thick fissured red-brown bark which is spongy to the touch. Older trees have trunks which are clear of branches

up to 20ft or so. The female cones are nearly 2in long and mature in the second year when they ripen from mid green to brown. The can persist on the tree for three or four years.

After many failures we have finally managed to get a decent 20 year old tree established at Caerhays on a hot dry bank with dappled shade in the afternoons. A cooler, drier atmosphere perhaps. We have heard very similar stories of successes and failures from our customers over the years in trying to grow this magnificent specimen tree which was first introduced to the UK in 1853.

images need adding still

Burncoose Nurseries: Gwennap, Redruth, Cornwall TR16 6BJ

Telephone: +44 (0) 1209 860316 Fax: +44 (0) 1209 860011 Email: info@burncoose.co.uk

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