

Umbrella-Pine (Japanese Umbrella-Pine), *Sciadopitys verticillata*

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Summary

Foliage: About 4 inches long; needle-like, in whorls around stem; evergreen

Height: About 25 to 35 feet

Spread: About 15 feet

Shape: Conical

Main Features

Umbrella-pine is a beautiful slow-growing conical conifer. Its beauty is mostly derived from the unusual texture that is imparted by the glossy dark-green needles that occur in whorls along the stem. The needles are relatively thick and have an unusual “plastic” feel to them. One must have patience for an umbrella-pine to become a prominent garden feature since it only grows about 6 to 9 inches per year; this slow growth rate also makes it a relatively expensive item in a garden center. This species is relatively rare in the nursery trade and prized by plant collectors. You may need to special order umbrella-pine from your local garden center. Umbrella-pines need ample moisture and a well-drained soil; these conditions are a **must**. Also, this species should not be planted in windy locations. I have witnessed the death of many umbrella-pines that were planted in a heavy soil or were not irrigated during drought periods. I had a beautiful 8-foot-tall specimen (about 14 years old) in my personal garden that perished in the drought of 2007. Old specimens, usually only found in arboreta, have a beautiful orange to reddish-brown bark.

Plant Needs

Zone: 4 to 7 (may languish in hotter portions of zone 7)

Light: Full sun to part shade

Moisture: Average to moist

Soil type: Well drained with ample organic matter (avoid soils with a high clay content)

pH range: Acid

Functions

Umbrella-pine is certainly suitable as a specimen plant (sufficient attributes to be featured as a focal point). Despite its slow growth rate, one must plant it in a location that will accommodate its mature size (at least 25 feet tall and 15 feet wide).

Care

As mentioned in the Main Features section, one must pay special attention to the soil and moisture requirements. In addition to a well-drained organic soil with ample moisture, one must irrigate during drought periods.

Additional Information

Umbrella-pine is not a true pine and is not in the pine family. Despite some difference in scientific opinion, most botanists place this species in the Sciadopityaceae family. There are a few cultivars in the trade that vary in form (conical, narrow conical/columnar, and mounded) and needle color (shades of green, yellow, and yellow-green). This species is highly revered in Japan, its country of origin. There is a plant at the Jinguji Temple in the Kyoto Prefecture of Japan that is claimed to be over 700 years old.