

TREE OF THE YEAR 2009

Juniper is one of the most drought resistant woody plants in Cyprus. It can thrive in the altitudinal zone of 0-600 m and perhaps a little higher. Regrettably, its use for ornament or as garden plant is rather uncommon. It is suitable for gardens, corridors, parks, and even for town pavements as it attains a tree habit, after planned pruning. It is propagated fairly easily with seed and cuttings. Plants are available in the Department of Forests' nurseries.

Management and Conservation

The Phoenician juniper is quite common locally in forest areas with shrubby vegetation along the coasts at low elevations. It is the main species of the habitat type "Arborescent matorral with *Juniperus* spp." (code 5212) and of the priority habitat types "*Coastal dunes with *Juniperus* spp." (code 2250*) and "*Juniperus phoenicea* formations" (code 9560*).

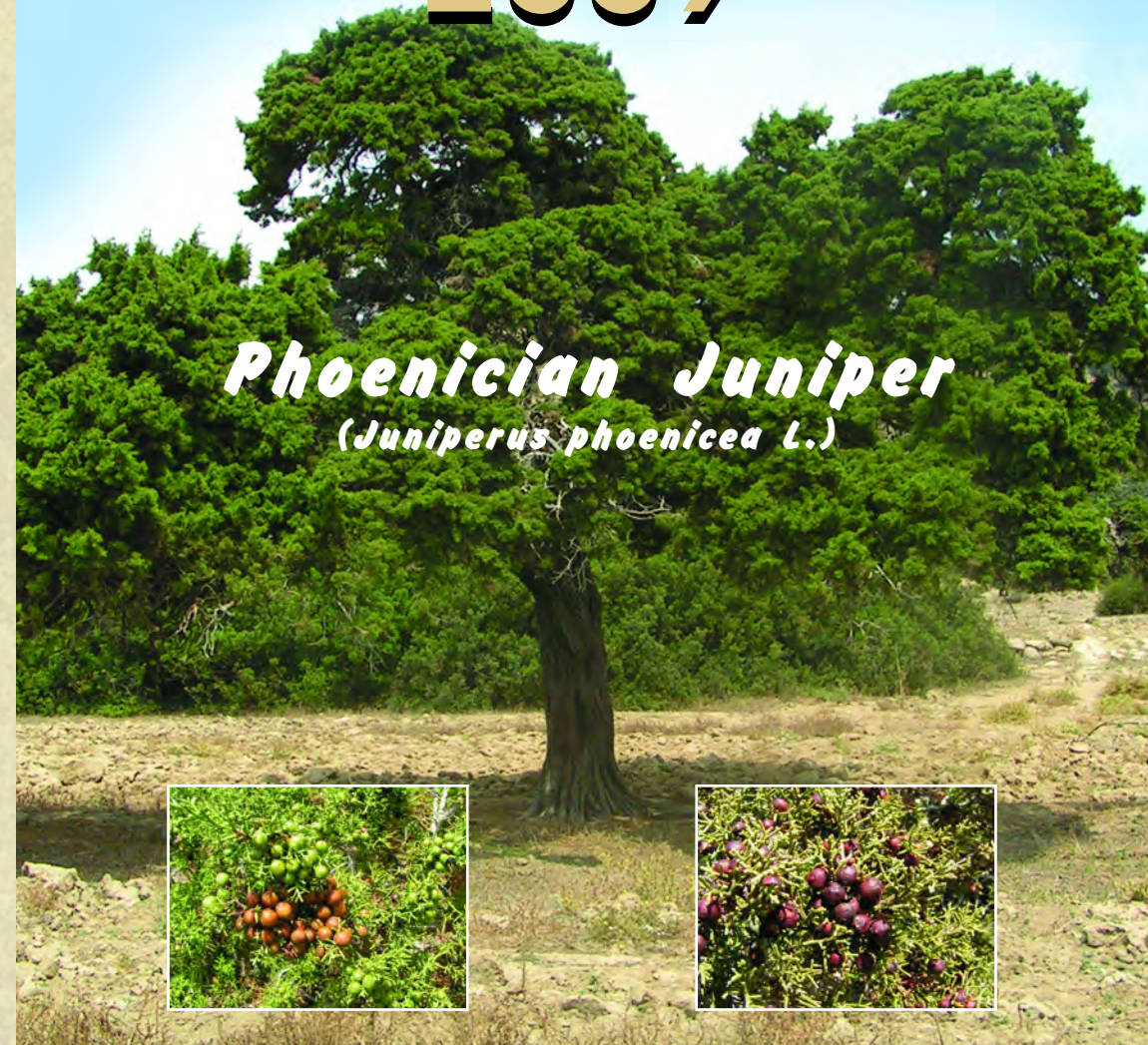
The largest part of the areas occupied by these habitat types in the government controlled part of the island, has been included in various Natura 2000 sites (e.g. Akamas and Kavο Gkreko) with the aim to safeguard their conservation. No fellings are allowed in the juniper's forests but yet it is threatened by fire as it does not regenerate satisfactorily after such an event. Usually, after a forest fire, planting of juniper is necessary to ensure its regeneration and perpetuation.



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General

The Phoenician juniper (*Juniperus phoenicea* L.) belongs to the family of Cypresses (*CUPRESSACEAE*). The genus *Juniperus* is represented in Cyprus by the following four indigenous species: *Juniperus oxycedrus* (prickly juniper), *J. phoenicea* (Phoenician juniper), *J. foetidissima* (foetid juniper or Troodos cypress) and *J. excelsa* (Grecian juniper or Madari juniper).



Description

The Phoenician juniper is an evergreen, aromatic, coniferous high shrub or small tree, up to 10 m high. It has a dense and conical crown. The bark is grey-brown or white-grey in ageing plants, peeling off in narrow strips. Leaves are small, opposite, scale-like, 1mm long, and in young plants needle-like. Leaves are generally very much alike to those of cypress from which is often distinguishable only by its fruits.



Flowers are unisexual, small, terminal; the male cones are yellow and the female, blackish-violet. They appear between February and

April, and in some years earlier. Plants are either monoecious or dioecious. The fruit is a berry-like, globose cone, lustrous, dark reddish-brown, up to 1.5 cm in diameter, with 3-6 seeds. It ripens from September to November of the second year after flowering.

Distribution - Habitat

The Phoenician juniper is a species occurring naturally across the warmest and driest zone of the Mediterranean. In Cyprus, it grows from sea level up to 500 m altitude, generally not far from the coasts. It is a common element of the maquis vegetation found in various coastal areas like Akamas Peninsula, Pissouri, Episkopi, Akrotiri, Zygi, Mazotos, Akrotirion Pyla, Kavo Gkreko, Salamina, Karpasia, Agios Ambrosios, Antifonitis and Kormakitis. The best conserved natural forests of juniper on the island occur in Akamas and Karpasia Peninsulas.

History - Uses

The wood is hard, fragrant and highly resistant to insect and fungi attacks. In many rural areas of Cyprus people used to place small wood pieces to protect clothes from insects and for its sweet scent. Due to its durability, it has been widely used for centuries in roofing, fencing and in other structures like the propellers of tread mills. These common uses have led in high yields of wood and eventually contributed to the reduction of juniper's natural forests. In antiquity it has been used also in the construction of coffins. Dioscuridis reports that juniper's fruits and wood had been used for scenting wine in some areas of ancient Greece. In addition, fruits were used for anointing the kings' dead bodies. Bedouins are said to have used its resin for producing an incense used in religious ceremonies.