

The tree of the year 2002

The Cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*)

Introduction

The cypress belongs to the family **Cupressaceae**, which comprises 17 genera with a world-wide distribution. Two of them, the **Cupressus** and the **Juniperus** are represented in Cyprus. The genus of **Cupressus** comprises 13 species with distribution in Southeast Europe, in temperate Asia and in North America. This genus is represented in Cyprus by the cypress (***Cupressus sempervirens***) which shows a considerable variation in the branching and shape of the crown and is divided into two varieties - the variety **horizontalis** (***Cupressus sempervirens*** var. **horizontalis**) with horizontal branches and the variety **pyramidalis** (***Cupressus sempervirens*** var. **sem-pervirens**) with erect branches.

In addition to the native **Cupressus sempervirens**, two exotic cypresses were recently introduced in Cyprus the **Cupressus arizonica** and the **Cupressus macrocarpa**.

The natural distribution of the cypress starts from Iran in the East and extends to Crete in the West. It also occurs in Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Asia Minor and in the Aegean islands (Rhodes, Milos, Samos, Chios).

History – Legend

The Cypress was well-known by ancient authors and together with pines, cedars, planes, alders and oaks formed the very dense forests with which Cyprus was covered 10,000 years ago.

According to mythology a young man from Kea, named "Kyparissos"



accidentally killed a beloved deer. Driven almost insane by grief at the deer's death, he asked the god Apollo to turn him into a tree. Apollo transformed him into the cypress, which became a symbol for grief and for this reason is usually planted in cemeteries and in the yards of churches and monasteries.

Description

It is an evergreen tree which in Cyprus reaches heights between 15 m – 30 m, with a pyramidal or conical crown. It is a monoecious tree with unisexual flowers. The male flowers are terminal on the branchlets, forming yellowish-brown, cylindrical or oval inflorescences, while the female ones are small inconspicuous cones at the base of the branchlets. The mature cones are spherical with a diameter of 2 cm – 3 cm and greeny-light brown in colour. The leaves are scaly, in opposite pairs covering the branchlets completely.

Cypress wood is scented, durable and of high quality. In ancient times it was used for making coffins, furniture and in building construction. Its resin was used for embalming the dead, while the leaves, the bark and the fruit are considered to have medicinal properties. Cypress timber nowadays is used for making furniture, poles, ships and in wood sculpture.





Ecology

The cypress is a very common tree growing from sea-level to 1200 m, mainly on limestone origin soils, forming dense forests on the northern range mountains, usually together with *Pinus brutia*. Small natural stands of the cypress occur in the "Lagouthera" area, "Kyparissia" of Limassol forest, "Avakas" gorge in

the Akamas peninsula, Panayia village and Kathikas village. It is also commonly used both for decoration and as windbreaks.

Management

Due to their high ecological value, the cypress forests have been included in the "Natura 2000" network of European sites of ecological value, in order to secure their protection and conservation.

Some gigantic cypress trees like those growing in Nisou, Kathikas, Salamiou, Vretsia and Kannavia villages, are also protected. The largest among them is the cypress growing at Vretsia, with a diameter of 1.4 m at the height of 1.30 m from the ground, while the one at Nisou is the tallest with 28 m height.

Although natural forests of cypress are not widely found in Cyprus, they have a high ecological value and should therefore be protected and conserved.

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