

# BALDCYPRESS

(*Taxodium distichum*)

No other feature defines the Caddo Lake landscape more than Baldcypress trees. Their beauty contributes to the mystery and majesty of the area, which the local communities depend on for recreation and tourism. Baldcypress are legendary trees of the Deep South known for their "knees," Spanish moss-draped crowns, and buttressed trunks. Caddo Lake is one of the best examples in the southern United States of a mature Baldcypress forest.

Baldcypress is a very long-lived, deciduous wetland species that grows in swamps and along rivers, streams, and creeks. The trees occur in the coastal plains along the Gulf and the Atlantic Ocean and north up through the Mississippi River Valley. Baldcypress can live up to 1,000 years (with one in the Carolinas estimated to be 1,200 years old), grow to 150 feet tall and up to 10 feet in diameter. At Caddo Lake, young stands of trees are about 100 years old while older stands include trees 150 to 400 years old.



N.D. BRUSH, USDA-NRCS  
PLANTS DATABASE

## BALDCYPRESS IN THE WETLAND ECOSYSTEM

Baldcypress trees are very important in Caddo Lake's wetland ecosystem, valuable for both food and cover for wildlife and fish. Swamp rabbits, gray squirrels and various bird species feed on the seeds of Baldcypress. Several species of bats roost under the loose bark of the trees or in the Spanish moss that hangs from the branches. Northern Parula warblers nest in the Spanish moss that commonly grows on the Baldcypress branches.

Woodpeckers and wood ducks use the upper bole cavities for nesting and roosting. Raccoons, beavers and possums will use the hollow trees for dens. The Bluehead Shiner, a threatened fish species, and other small fish will dart to the submerged trunks and knees of Baldcypress trees for protection.

Baldcypress trees produce cones that yield an average of 5,200 seeds per pound. Baldcypress trees grow from these seeds, which are produced annually, though good seed production occurs about every three years in a forest. Seeds are dispersed by flood waters. Under wetland conditions, seed germination and early growth generally takes place on exposed soil with high soil moisture and an opening in the forest canopy. Seedlings can survive completely submerged for only brief periods. Thus, due to the relatively constant water-levels resulting from dams on Caddo Lake and Lake O' the Pines (as well as beaver and nutria damage), few seedlings have survived at Caddo Lake in the last 100 years.

Baldcypress trees develop a taproot as well as horizontal roots that lie just below the surface of the water and extend up to 50 feet before turning down. They also develop "knees," cone-shaped extensions of the root system protruding from the ground that provide additional support and stability.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT**  
[www.fpl.fs.fed.us/documnts/usda/amwood/218baldc.pdf](http://www.fpl.fs.fed.us/documnts/usda/amwood/218baldc.pdf)



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JOHN JOHANSSON, CADDOPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

## WOOD FOR DURABILITY AND ORNAMENTAL BEAUTY

Because of the unique shape of the tree, local artists have created clocks, furniture, and wall décor from the cross-sections of the base of the trunk and polished and carved the "knees." People have historically also made boats and paddles from the wood. Because of its durability and resistance to rot, the heartwood of the Baldcypress tree has been used for building construction, especially beams, posts, siding, and porches. However, this rot resistance takes up to 80 years to develop. Widespread cutting of mature trees for garden mulch is an imminent danger for Baldcypress forests in many parts of the South.



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