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Chamaecyparis obtusa (False Cypress-Hinoki) ID #982

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Samuel Johnson
Bio 140-Lab, Humans and Their Environment
Arboretum Tree Project
Due: 4/24/2020

Specimen Identified: False Cypress-Hinoki
Scientific Name: *Chamaecyparis Obtusa*
Identification Number: #982



Figure 1: Taken March 5th, 2020

For the beginning portion of the semester, myself and the rest of the Biology 140 Lab, Humans and Their Environment were tasked with recording and documenting a single tree in the Salve Regina Arboretum. "In recognition of the University's ongoing efforts to preserve and protect its 1,200 trees of more than 100 different species, Salve Regina's campus has been recognized as a Level II arboretum by the Morton Arboretum's ArbNet Arboretum Accreditation Program."¹ Arboreal work on the campus was launched in 2012 as part of Salve's historic tree and landscape program.

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My individual tree is a False Cypress-Hinoki, from Japan. It is located right by the gate leading into the driveway to the O'Hare Academic Center. It towers over the Misto Gatehouse right in front of McAuley Hall. It is listed as number 982. For the first section of the semester, I took pictures periodically of my tree, and monitored how it was "doing." However, given the limited amount of time that we had on campus this spring, I wasn't able to see it go through any major changes in its seasonal cycle.

This tree has beautiful reddish-brown bark. It can typically get to about 60 feet high and has a spread of about 20 feet. My tree, according to my calculations, is 33.4 feet. It is native to temperate northern temperature biomes, originally from Japan. It is lauded for its high-quality timber, which serves as ornamental accents in Eastern arts. It is grown in medium moisture soils, preferably in full sun. I had witnessed my tree in a couple of windstorms, which are common by the water at Salve Regina. The larger limbs and the tops of the tree were swaying substantially in the wind, despite the best effort of the university to hide it behind the Misto Gatehouse. This tree does prefer as minimal wind as possible.

The branches of this species are spread wide with "flattened horizontal branchlets that droop at the ends."² In its native area of Japan, hinoki means "fire tree." This is in reference to the reddish-brown bark. The family, "Chamaecyparis" is a conifer family, with worldwide distribution. There are some notable cultivars in this family of trees. Some of my favorites are the "Blue Feathers hinoki-cypress," the "Compact hinoki-cypress," the "Dwarf hinoki-cypress," and the "Dwarf slender hinoki-cypress." These trees vary in height from just a few feet to 12 feet. They are considerably smaller than my False Cypress. They differ not just in size, but in bark texture, timber color, "leaf" characteristics, as well as cones.³

This tree species has some interesting changes that occur in the different seasons. It has golden green foliage in the summer. However, in the winter, they fade to a beautiful golden yellow color. The tree grows slowly during the Spring, Summer, and Fall seasons, but "hardens" during the winter to survive.

There are numerous uses for this tree. In Japan, it has been "revered for centuries for its beautiful, durable wood and the fragrant essential oils of its bark, wood and foliage." It has hardy, rich grain, that is resistant to splitting, rot, or warping. Because of these characteristics, it has been used for construction and tools throughout history. It is also common in art, being utilized for sculptures regularly. In the cultural side of things, it is used in Shinto ceremonies and purification rituals.⁴ Historically speaking, this is incredibly important. The Shinto was the state religion of Japan until 1945. It incorporates the worship of ancestors and nature spirits. The sacred power "kami" is present, according to the Shinto, in both animate and inanimate things. They constantly utilized the timber of the False Cypress Hinoki in the construction of their temples and places of worship.

Figure 2: Taken February 24th, 2020





Figure 3: Taken March 7th, 2020

Currently, there are no poems, songs, or literature about this species of tree. However, the Shinto religion in Japan has used the timber of this species to write religious text upon for centuries. They are still in high demand, being sold for hundreds of dollars. The timber is used for prayer beads in the religion as well, for the followers to talk to “kami” through.

This species of tree is important to the arboretum at Salve Regina as a whole. It is a sign of the diversity in trees that we have on campus, this one originally from thousands of miles and oceans away. It allows for environmental awareness and appreciation on campus, as well as a umbrella for the students waiting for the shuttle huddled under it in the rainy island of Aquidneck.

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