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Chamaecyparis obtusa (False Cypress-Hinoki), ID #982

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Margaret Kimball

December 11, 2020

BIO 140L: Humans and Their Environment Lab

Salve Regina University



False Cypress-Hinoki

Chamaecyparis Obtusa

ID# 982

Salve Regina University prides itself upon the elegant landscape and rare tree species found on the property. In order to preserve and cherish these special trees, Salve decided to become an accredited national arboretum. The Salve Regina University arboretum was established in 2012 and during the first year over 1100 trees were tagged with an identification number. There are 98 different species of trees with the most common being Acer. Salve's mission with this "We value this land surrounding our campus, and we feel a strong sense of responsibility to preserve it for future generations of students, members of the community and visitors to Newport" (Arboretum at Salve Regina).

During the fall of 2020, my biology lab classmates and I each picked a tree that stood on Salve Regina University's campus and studied its life over the semester. The tree I selected was ID number 982, a False Cypress-Hinoki. This particular tree stood tall outside of the gated entrance to O'Hare and McAuley and was one that I passed every day on my way to class.



Each time I passed my tree, I observed its seasonal changes. My observations began during October of 2020 and ran until November of 2020. This tree did not lose leaves or thorns because it was able to withstand the seasonal weather change with its evergreen thorns. There were not any major changes in the way that the tree looked.

The False Hinoki Cypress is natively found in Japan, specifically in the Kiso Valley. Aside from being a beautiful tree with thin, bright green thistles, it also is very low maintenance. Its aromatic wood is used for making theaters, shrines, and palaces. In Japan, many people grow this tree for its ornamental qualities on their property. The bark and wood from this cypress

omits a strong essential oil that was widely used in aromatherapy in Japan. When this tree is mature, it typically will be between 50 and 75 feet tall and 10 to 30 feet wide. There are dwarf versions of this tree that only grow to about 10 feet tall, although those are less common.

The country of Japan has a temperate climate with four seasons. Some areas of Japan have warm, wet summers and mild winters. These two characteristics are similar to the climate of Newport, RI, where my tree was found. This tree thrives in medium moisture, well-drained soil. It also enjoys full sun but will stand part shade. This tree is typically planted in fall or early spring. Once it has established roots, this tree will grow through any growing season. The native biological community of the False Hinoki Cypress includes many cultivators including Butter Ball, Confucious, Ellie B, Gemstone, Gracilis, and many more.



In ancient Japan, five trees were labeled to be “Five Trees of Kiso.” These five trees were *Chamaecyparis obtusa*, *Chamaecyparis pisifera*, *Sciadopitys verticillata*, *Thuja standishii*, *Thujopsis dolabrata*. *Chamaecyparis obtusa*, or the False Hinoki Cypress tree, represented purity, as its trunk grew a pale color. It also gained this repertoire because this cypress suffers in heavily polluted air, therefore growing in more purified areas. The timber from this tree was highly regarded by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, a Japanese leader during the 16th century. Eventually,

these trees became so scarce from the demand for them that they instilled a “one tree, one head” capital punishment. Finally, during WWII, the Kiso Valley began to be protected as a National Forest.

The False Hinoki Cypress is found in many poems and songs in Japanese culture. They are portrayed as sad, tall, lonely beings that aspire to be more. A quote from the book *The Pillow Book* by Sei Shonagon is as follows:

"Tomorrow I will become" ... the false cypress prays every night to become a real cypress.

(asu wa hinoki ni naru)

Some people spend the whole day drinking sake and enjoying life, while wondering if tomorrow they will become "better".

This tree seems to be a symbol of mourning, in this case a past life. The reader can assume that the tree is looking for more and wants to say goodbye to its old life as a “false” cypress.

The False Hinoki Cypress tree is especially important to Salve Regina’s beautiful campus. Its origin shows that Newport has roots from all over the world, even Japan. The species of trees that are not native to Newport give a very welcoming and including message to everyone visiting. The tree stands tall and strong in front of our academic buildings giving every passerby the reminder that they may not have their roots here, but they can always call Newport home.

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