



Sawara Falsecypress (Japanese Falsecypress),

Chamaecyparis pisifera

Alex X. Niemiera, Professor, School of Plant and Environmental Sciences, Virginia Tech

Summary

Foliage: Scale-like; also awl-like in some cultivars; evergreen

Height: About 60 feet

Spread: About 15 feet

Shape: Conical

Main Features

Sawara falsecypress is a medium to large conifer. There are numerous cultivars that are more popular and prevalent in the nursery trade than the species. Cultivars vary in size (growth rate), foliage type and color, and form. Many of the cultivars are considered “dwarf” since they do not attain the mature size of the species. There are four foliage types: 1) the scale foliage of the species is termed “normal,” 2) plumosa, lateral leaves (very small) protrude from the facial (middle) leaf which confers a fine texture to the foliage; 3) squarrosa, foliage is awl-like (juvenile characteristic); and 4) filifera, scale-like foliage occurs in pendulous long thread-like sections (mostly). Foliage color varies from green, to bluish, to bright yellow. Popular cultivars include ‘Boulevard’, a dwarf narrow conical form with silvery-blue awl-like foliage (squarrosa type), requires pruning (shearing is recommended) because unpruned plants become sparse which exposes unsightly brown dead foliage; ‘Filifera’, a conical dwarf form (will grow to 30+ feet tall) with thread-like foliage; ‘Filifera Aurea’ and ‘Golden Mop’ are conical forms with yellow thread-like foliage (the later cultivar is more compact); and ‘Snow’ is an upright mound (round in youth) with fern-like blue-gray foliage, but newly formed branched tips are white.

Plant Needs

Zone: 4 to 8

Light: Full sun to full shade (plants will be more open in shady conditions)

Moisture: Average

Soil type: Average

pH range: Acid

Functions

There are several landscape uses for sawara falsecypress since there are many diverse cultivars that vary in size, form, color, and texture. The species or cultivars can serve as specimen plants (sufficient attributes that a plant can be featured as a focal point), in groupings, as accent plants, or in small garden spaces (dwarf cultivars). Yellow foliage cultivars have a very striking appearance; overuse of these can result in a gaudy or theme park appearance.

Care

Sawara falsecypress are relatively carefree. An exception to this is the aforementioned 'Boulevard' that requires regular shearing to maintain a kempt appearance.

Additional Information

Branches with scale-like foliage are referred to as "sprays." Bark on tree forms is quite attractive (brown-red). 'Filifera', ultimately a medium tree with pendulous sprays of thread-like foliage, are quite beautiful. Lower branches of this cultivar that come into contact with the ground will produce roots. These rooted sections will then produce vertical shoots creating a colony of stems around the mother trunk. The American Conifer Society (<http://conifersociety.org/cs2/>) has an impressive conifer database (including photos for species and cultivars); one must register (no fee required) to view all information/photos in their database. To find species and cultivar information, go to the home page and click on ConiferBase, and then click on Database.

