Umbrella-Pine (Japanese Umbrella-Pine),
*Sciadopitys verticillata*

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

**Summary**

*Foliage:* About 4 inches long; needle-like, in whorls around stem; evergreen  
*Height:* About 25 to 35 feet  
*Spread:* About 15 feet  
*Shape:* Conical

**Main Features**

Umbrella-pine is a beautiful slow-growing conical conifer. Its beauty is mostly derived from the unusual texture that is imparted by the glossy dark-green needles that occur in whorls along the stem. The needles are relatively thick and have an unusual “plastic” feel to them. One must have patience for an umbrella-pine to become a prominent garden feature since it only grows about 6 to 9 inches per year; this slow growth rate also makes it a relatively expensive item in a garden center. This species is relatively rare in the nursery trade and prized by plant collectors. You may need to special order umbrella-pine from your local garden center. Umbrella-pines need ample moisture and a well-drained soil; these conditions are a must. Also, this species should not be planted in windy locations. I have witnessed the death of many umbrella-pines that were planted in a heavy soil or were not irrigated during drought periods. I had a beautiful 8-foot-tall specimen (about 14 years old) in my personal garden that perished in the drought of 2007. Old specimens, usually only found in arboreta, have a beautiful orange to reddish-brown bark.

**Plant Needs**

*Zone:* 4 to 7 (may languish in hotter portions of zone 7)  
*Light:* Full sun to part shade  
*Moisture:* Average to moist  
*Soil type:* Well drained with ample organic matter (avoid soils with a high clay content)  
*pH range:* Acid

**Functions**

Umbrella-pine is certainly suitable as a specimen plant (sufficient attributes to be featured as a focal point). Despite its slow growth rate, one must plant it in a location that will accommodate its mature size (at least 25 feet tall and 15 feet wide).

**Care**

As mentioned in the Main Features section, one must pay special attention to the soil and moisture requirements. In addition to a well-drained organic soil with ample moisture, one must irrigate during drought periods.
Additional Information

Umbrella-pine is not a true pine and is not in the pine family. Despite some difference in scientific opinion, most botanists place this species in the Sciadopityaceae family. There are a few cultivars in the trade that vary in form (conical, narrow conical/columnar, and mounded) and needle color (shades of green, yellow, and yellow-green). This species is highly revered in Japan, its country of origin. There is a plant at the Jinguji Temple in the Kyoto Prefecture of Japan that is claimed to be over 700 years old.