

Juniperus thurifera, Spanish juniper

General information: Junipers are evergreen conifers in the cypress family. They vary from tall trees to low, trailing shrubs. All Junipers have distinctive seed cones that **look like berries** but are actually 2 to 3 pairs of incurved bracts fused to form a very small cone. Junipers can be monoecious or dioecious.

Juniperus thurifera is dioecious. On female trees the 7-10mm cones, which are terminal, begin as green, spend most of their life as dark blue with a whitish waxy bloom and mature to dark purple in about 18 months. Each cone contains up to 3 seeds which are dispersed by animals and birds, particularly thrushes. (Male cones on male trees are 3-4 mm long, yellow-green maturing to light brown and shed pollen in early Spring.)

Juniperus thurifera var. *africana* is threatened in the wild, but *Juniperus thurifera* var. *gallica* remains a stable woodland species and there are famous, old-growth *Juniperus thurifera* forests in Spain (eg in the Sierra di Solonco) in which the juniper grows among oak species.

GBG specimen: Our *Juniperus thurifera* is a female tree with dark blue berry-like cones. It is one of GBG's Heritage Listed trees. It is listed as the only confirmed member of the species in Victoria. It is estimated to have been planted in the first decade of the 20th century and thus to be over 100 years old. The species can live for 500 years. I like the placement of our *Juniperus thurifera* near the *Cedrus atlantica*, one of its companion plants in the wild in the Atlas Mountains.

Once, when small, our tree would have had juvenile needle-like leaves. It now has adult scale-leaves of blue-green. Once it had thin, dark brown bark. With age that has weathered to grey-brown, and has exfoliated in strips. *Juniperus thurifera* trees do not normally exceed 8 metres in height, so ours is on the tall side. It has grown beyond being an attractive pyramid shape to the more irregular shape of older age.



Juniperus thurifera in the GBG
Cherry Collins



Juniperus thurifera female cones
Nicolas Montès n.montes.free.fr

Family: Cupressaceae

Genus: *Juniperus*

Species: *Juniperus thurifera*

Common names: Spanish Juniper, Incense Juniper

Origin: Western Mediterranean:

Spain and Southern France

(*Juniperus thurifera* var. *gallica*);

Morocco (*Juniperus thurifera* var. *africana*)

Location in GBG: In the Oak Lawn, between the Tea House and the Perennial Border, in the 19th Century Garden.

Meanings of its name: *Juniperus* comes from combining *parere* and *junio* meaning 'to produce' and 'youth' ie. evergreen. *Thurifera* comes from *turifer* meaning 'incense bearer'.

Other species (Roger Spencer)

Eastern Park:

J. excelsa Grecian Juniper is Heritage listed. It is the only one known in SE Australia.

J. oxycedrus subsp. *oxycedrus* Prickly Juniper.

Geelong Botanic Gardens:

J. rigida is the only one known in Victoria.

J. chinensis Chinese Juniper

J. communis Common Juniper

Uses: The aromatic foliage of *Juniperus thurifera* has long been used for incense in religious ceremonies (See 'Meanings of its name'). It was also used as fodder for donkeys and goats. The wood was used for construction, fencing and tools. The juniper 'berries' used to flavour gin ('gin' is a shortening of the Dutch word for juniper: 'genever') come from a different Juniper species, *Juniperus communis*.



Juniperus thurifera Segovia, Spain

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This information was developed
by Cherry Collins
Volunteer Guide
Friends of
Geelong Botanic Gardens

www.friendsgbg.org.au
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