

## Common Yew (*Taxus baccata*)

The Common Yew is an evergreen conifer, and forms a large bush or small tree that can grow 35 to 60 feet tall with a spread of 15 to 25 feet in some cases. The flaky bark is red-brown or purplish, often fluted, and thin. Twigs are green for about 2 years. The leaves are flat with a raised rib on the dark-green upper side and have a green petiole and are light green underneath. Strong variations in leaf size, shape and color can be seen on the many cultivars that exist.

This species is very shade tolerant and also strongly tolerant of air pollution and pruning. Once established, it is quite tolerant of drought. Yews may live to be more than 1000 years old, but actual ages are hard to determine because the oldest trees are hollow inside so one can not count the growth rings.

The Yew has been a very important tree in history. Many ancient myths are associated with this plant and holy Yew trees occur across Europe. The oldest wooden tool ever found is reported to be a Yew spear more than 250,000 years old. Recently, Yew has achieved fame as a source of the important anti-cancer drug, Taxol. The Yew has probably been best known for being used to make long bows.