



University of California Cooperative Extension – Kern County

NEWS RELEASE

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Cypress Tree Problems

Two cypress tree species are frequently found in Kern County landscapes and windbreaks. In recent years significant numbers of these cypress species appear to be in poor health, principally due to their limited adaptation to the local climate. Some opportunistic pests may accelerate their decline.

Arizona cypress, *Cupressus arizonica*, and Leyland cypress, *Cupressocyparis leylandii*, have been extensively planted throughout Kern County. These species are often found in windbreak plantings around houses or corrals. Arizona cypress has been widely established in Mojave desert landscapes in the Ridgecrest, Rosamond, and Mojave areas, while Leyland cypress has been planted in Tehachapi and on the San Joaquin Valley floor. Both species possess cold tolerance sufficient for almost any Kern County location. Arizona cypress is considered to be drought tolerant based on its performance in desert areas. When vigorous, these cypresses have few pest problems.

In recent years a number of these trees appear to be declining or have died. In almost all situations plants have apparently been adequately irrigated and otherwise well maintained. For Leyland cypress, the fundamental problem appears to be a lack of adaptation to the warm, dry climate found in Central California, that renders the species susceptible to attack by a canker disease, resulting in a life expectancy of 12-15 years. It has not been uncommon to see entire rows of Leyland cypress turn brown together, almost as though a clock had struck, and this despite sufficient irrigation and appropriate maintenance. Fungal pathogens, such as cypress canker, *Seridium* or *Coryneum cardinale*, cause lesions to form on small

branches, resulting in death of branch tips, often followed by colonization of larger-diameter wood. This process of decline and death often occurs over 1 - 2 years. Fungicides cannot be expected to provide any control of this disease, and are not recommended. Although Leyland cypress trees grow rapidly and provide an excellent screen, their short life expectancy must be considered if they are selected for planting in Central California or desert locations.

For Arizona cypress, tree ages are about 20-30 years at the time of decline. These trees appear to be nearing the end of their natural life span in the desert, but their decline may be accelerated by bark beetle attack. Although trunk sprays of insecticides may forestall beetle attacks, insecticides are a distant third line of defense – after keeping plants vigorous (especially by supplying sufficient irrigation) and preventing injury (such as from sunburn), which are far more effective strategies.

