

Scrub Cypress Pine

Callitris gracilis

NAMING: Callitris from Greek kalos (beautiful) and treis (three) referring to the leaves growing in slender whorls of three. Other common names include Southern Cypress-Pine, Native Pine or Murray Pine.

DISTRIBUTION: *Callitris gracilis* is a native pine that occurs naturally in most states of Australia.

HABITAT: In South Australia they are widespread in the lower rainfall areas. They grow mostly in sandy, rocky well-drained soils often containing limestone and can appear in dense populations where they are dominant.

DESCRIPTION: *Callitris gracilis* is an evergreen tree with flattened shoots bearing small scale-like leaves. The dark green foliage stands out in the dry landscapes making them very distinctive.



They are slow growing for the first few years, they will then spurt, producing the mature tree after 5-10 years. They are drought resistant, tolerating annual rainfall as low as 300mm. Depending on the rainfall, they can grow from a 15 meter conical shaped tree with a single trunk and dark rough bark to a 3-5 meter bush.

As they are conifers, they do not have flowers, instead they produce small, rounded **woody cones**. These grey-brown cones appear in late spring often associated with clouds of pollen produced on small orange-brown modified leaves 'strobili'. Once



fertilised the small cones mature (autumn) and open to release the 2-4cm winged seeds.

TRADITIONAL USE: Indigenous People on the Murray River made a combined canoe pole and fish-spear nearly 4 m long from the wood of the tree. The heated gum was also used to glue stone to tools such as axes and spear barbs.

OTHER USES: The wood is durable and resistant to termites. Younger plants grow with a long straight trunk. The trees are used for shelter, windbreaks and for stabilisation of dune country. They are excellent feature trees for large gardens or parks and are important plants for food and shelter for many bird species.

INTERESTING FACTS: *Callitris* trees are commonly called cypress pines because they are related to, and resemble, northern hemisphere cypresses. However, they are not true pines. Cypress and Pine are two different families of conifers. Pines have clusters of long needle shaped leaves and larger cones.