

Plant Profile: Dawn Redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*)

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Three of Hillwood's most magnificent trees can be found in the large bed between the mansion and the visitor center. They are dawn redwoods, distinctive because of their soft, almost hazy-looking bright green foliage, and because they are deciduous conifers, dropping their needles in fall.

Dawn redwoods date back to the time of the dinosaurs, about 100 million years ago, living throughout North America and Asia. Known only by fossils and thought to be extinct, a small grove was discovered in central China in 1944, and a few years later, seeds were distributed to arboreta in the United States and Europe. All of the trees now in existence originate from those seeds.

Our trees here at Hillwood were planted in 1960, when they were only five feet tall. Now over 65 feet tall, we can expect them to grow as tall as 100 feet. Dawn redwoods have a pyramidal form, a lovely fluted trunk that flares at the bottom, and gracefully sweeping branches. In autumn, the needles turn a noticeable rust color and drop to the ground. At the same time, you may also observe clusters of hanging male flowers, and if you walk up a little closer, the small, round brown cones.



Dawn Redwood outside of motor court entrance



Autumn color

Because of its size, dawn redwood is best suited for large yards or properties where it has room to grow, and where it can be appreciated as a specimen tree.

Some of the new, smaller cultivars could be readily used in smaller landscapes.

'Ogon' or 'Goldrush' has bright gold, chartreuse needles and grows to about half the size of the true species, about 40 feet tall and 20 feet wide.

'Jack Frost' has white-tipped needles, particularly on new growth. 60 feet tall and 20 feet wide. Similar cultivars are 'White Spot', 'White Tips', or 'Snow Flurry'.

'Miss Grace' is a small, weeping tree that, will over a long time, reach 15 feet tall and 10 feet wide.

And 'National' was introduced by the US National Arboretum. It is upright and a little narrower than the species, and does very well in climates with high humidity.

The next time you visit the National Arboretum, don't miss the spectacular grove of dawn redwoods which can be found across from the entrance to the Gotelli Collection of dwarf conifers. It is a feast for the eyes and the senses at any time of the year.