

## Utah Juniper

*(Juniperus osteosperma)*

Utah Juniper is a mid-sized tree found in the western third of the US. It seldom grows beyond 30 feet tall, and usually has a bushy appearance. The wood from Utah Juniper is very decay-resistant, and has been used extensively for fence posts and firewood. Utah Junipers are very slow growing trees (a Utah Juniper only 5 feet tall may be 50 years old!), but long-lived, with a life span of 600 years or more. They are very hardy trees, with a taproot as deep as 25 feet that can grow through and around rocky soils, and a shallower root system that may extend up to 100 feet from the trunk. The Utah Juniper (along with the Pinyon Pine, which is not an allergenic plant) is the most common tree in the southwestern US and appears to be expanding its geography.

All members of the genus *Juniperus* are considered to be significant allergenic plants. The pollen they produce throughout the spring is considered to be a severe allergen. The pollen can travel miles from a given tree in the right winds. While not all Junipers (there at least 17 different Junipers in the US) are available as allergenic extracts to test and treat with, the extensive cross-reactivity between all Junipers makes that moot. Not only is it almost impossible to tell the difference between one Juniper's pollen and another, but in the western US different Junipers actually hybridize (cross-fertilize, producing a new strain of Juniper). None of this matters, however. Juniper is an important allergenic plant capable of causing asthma and allergic rhinitis and conjunctivitis.

