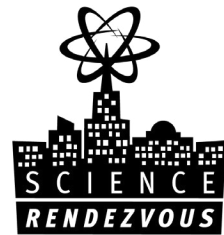




# GIIZHIK TEACHINGS



This work was made possible by National Science Engineering Research Council [NSERC] PromoScience Funding PROSC/577339-22.

## Acknowledgement & Gratitude

“Acknowledging the Indigenous peoples’ presence in Canada requires a deep understanding of their rich history, which dates back to over 12,000 years ago, marking the end of the last ice age. Evidence shows that Indigenous people began building their civilizations across Turtle Island (today’s North America) as soon as the ice melted. These civilizations predate European colonies in the Americas by over 10,000 years, and even predate by several thousand years civilizations that became part of present-day Europe. To appropriately recognize the Indigenous communities and lands, settlers should have a basic awareness of the history and circumstances that led to the current state of those communities. Canada is not a conquered country but a land of treaties, and most Canadians today are considered Treaty people because of the Indigenous peoples. These treaties were established in partnership with various Indigenous communities, some continuing to practice their complex cultures. Understanding which treaties and Indigenous civilization(s) make up the places we call home is an essential step towards reconciliation and preserving the intricate Indigenous knowledge(s) of those places.”

- Mkomose (Dr. Andrew Judge), Oshkaabewis

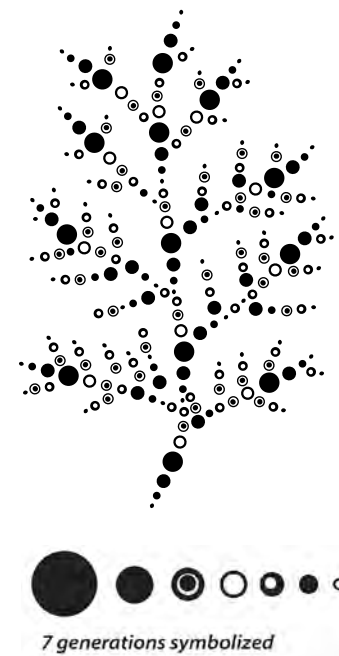
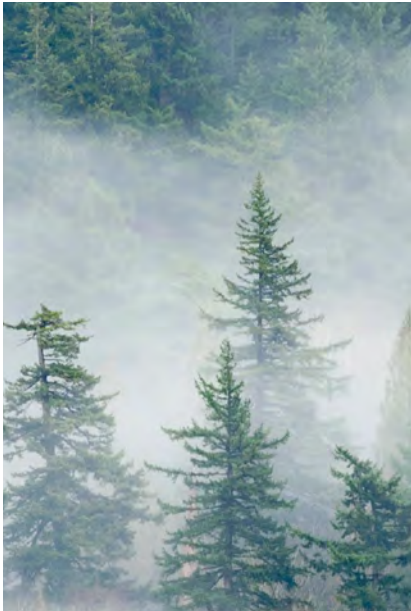
## Giizhik Teachings Introduction

Giizhik teachings were created in what is now called Winnipeg, Manitoba. Treaty One Territory, is the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe (Ojibway), Ininew (Cree), Oji-Cree, Dene, and Dakota, and which is the birthplace of the Métis Nation and the Heart of the Métis Nation Homeland. This document aims to guide us in moving beyond mere land acknowledgment towards a proactive commitment to appreciating the significance of Giizhik/Cedar and caring for our planet.

As educators, it is our responsibility to teach our students the true history of Turtle Island and the impacts of settler colonialism on this land. We must help students become empathetic and culturally aware of the history of Canada so that they can recognize their roles and responsibilities as Treaty people on Indigenous lands.

Education rooted in equality, diversity, and inclusion will prepare our future leaders to build a better future for seven generations to come.

The Giizhik Teachings emblem was crafted with intention, it bears the essence of seven generations through stylized bead designs, weaving a tapestry that echoes the wisdom of our ancestors. At its heart lies the strength of the cedar leaf, a symbol of growth, resilience, and interconnectedness. Just as circles abound in nature’s patterns, from indigenous art to biological rhythms, our logo beckons you to delve into the stories and lessons that bind us together. Join us as we honour the past, embrace the present, and shape the future through Giizhik Teachings.





# INTRODUCTION

Cedar trees, among the oldest and largest life forms in Canada, have flourished for centuries spanning from the east to the west coasts, significantly influencing the country's history. Many Indigenous communities utilized cedar for crafting canoes, shelters, garments, and other necessities. This valuable knowledge was shared with the early European settlers, aiding in their survival and adjustment to the Canadian environment. Referred to as *Arborvitaes*, the Cedar tree signifies 'Tree of Life' in Latin and holds sacred status among many Indigenous peoples. Cedar carries profound cultural and spiritual importance embodying Indigenous people's deep connection to the land, their ancestral traditions, and their sustainable way of life.

Throughout this guide, traditional Indigenous knowledge and the science of the cedar appear side by side. But first, we begin with an explanation of the Anishinaabe worldview.

## Anishinaabe Worldview

“Indigenous people have an innate relationship with everything that exists on Earth and in the Universe: the lands, waters, rocks, trees, plants, insects, moon, sun, and stars. We see ourselves as the Universe.

*Knowing that Sacred Beautiful.* We are the people who know there is a Spirit in every living thing from a flower, leaf, ladybug, butterfly, buffalo, bear, eagle, mountain, water, our Mother the Earth, the Sun our Grandfather, the Moon our Grandmother, and our Ancestors the Stars. We are relatives. We are all related and acknowledge that connection in our teachings, stories, and songs of that sacred and beautiful web of life in the vast Universe.

We have been misunderstood and we have been feared. We were judged, convicted, and mistreated. But now at this significant time, we are in a Spiritual Evolution where they now come to the people who were thought of as less, with no god. But we are the people who have always seen holiness, godliness, and sacredness in everything from the smallest insect to the planets and stars in the Universe.

We are the people who have known this heaven on Mother Earth; we felt and lived that nurturing, blissfulness, gratefulness, and love just as living in heaven. We are the people who have no judgment, no shame, no blame, and no jealousy. We are the people who lived as one with everything as our equal and as our relatives. We are the people

who honoured the sacred creator, the life-giving woman. We always knew who we were.

The world of people who lost that Spiritual desire to know that beauty that is deeply rooted in our Indigenous essence. We are seeing that beauty and knowing that sacredness inside of us. We are returning to that beauty within and acknowledging that sacred beauty is everywhere.

It is important to mention that as an Anishinaabe, the word “planet” does not resonate in my thinking—this word seems false. For Indigenous people, we don’t think that way; rather, we have this great reverence for the ‘Earth.’ This is why we say that we are all related, and we feel it deeply that way.”

*Written by Diane Maytwayashing, Indigenous Knowledge Keeper*



*Photograph of Grandmother & Knowledge Keeper Diane Maytwayashing, taken at Whiteshell Provincial Park. Photo supplied by permission from Indigenous Tourism of Manitoba.*

## Why Giizhik Matters to the Anishinaabe

Giizhik, an Anishinaabe term for cedar, is closely related to Giizhig, meaning Sky. Symbolizing protection and balance, the majestic cedar stands tall, bridging the gap between the physical and spiritual worlds. Cedar is held in high esteem as a sacred remedy by the Anishinaabe community and plays a crucial role in the ecosystems that sustain their societies. Contemplating Giizhik prompts us to respect the Earth’s offerings and strengthen our bond with Mother Earth.

### “Traditional Anishinaabe Advice to Youth”

According to the Anishinaabe, there is a story that speaks to the importance of cedar. It says,

“If in the future you should find yourself separated from the People, if you should be carried away by an alien tribe into a distant land, or if you should fall asleep on a night march and wake to find yourself alone, or if you should be blown off course in your canoe to an unknown shore, here is what you must do: Climb to a high place. Find a hill or climb a tree. Look out over the countryside. If you can see the white gleam of Mishoomis-wigwams, Grandfather Birch, and the tall spires of Nookomis-giizhik, Grandmother Cedar, relax! You are safe! You are with your relatives. Between them, Grandmother and Grandfather will provide everything you need for life, and they will get you home again in this life or the next.”

- *Plants have so much to teach us*

According to the Coast Salish, there was a good man who always gave away his belongings and food to others. The Creator recognized the man's kindness and declared that once he died, a Red Cedar tree would grow where he was buried, and the tree would continue to help the people.



## Glossary

Some words and phrases related to cedar are given here. Recordings of many Anishinaabemowin words are available from [The Ojibwe People's Dictionary](#).

English	Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe)
Cedar	Giizhik
Cedar Bark	Giizhikanagek
Tobacco	Asemaa [ q'w'alí- 'smoke' -amal- 'something' -tán- 'tool, thing for' ]
Grandmother	Nookomis
Great Spirit, Creator	Gichi-manidoo
Tea	Aniibiish
Medicine	Mashkiki
Spirit dish/food offering	Wiikondiwin
Make an offering of tobacco	Biindaakoozh 1 kátt (perfective transitive) [ kátt- 'give' -t- 'him/her/it' ] give to



[Click here](#) to view the Story of the Cedar by Herb Rice on YouTube. Indigenous peoples throughout Canada have different and equally valuable Teachings—we encourage you to learn about them, too!



## WHAT IS GIIZHIK?



## AWEGODOGWEN GIIZHIKAATIG?

**Giizhikaatig** is cedar tree in the [Ojibwe language](#); scientists call this tree *Cedrus*. It is a genus of coniferous trees—(*Thuja*) of the cypress family (*Cupressaceae*). The two most common types of cedar trees in Canada are the Eastern White Cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*), and The Western Red Cedar (*Thuja. plicata*). The Western Red Cedar (*T. plicata*), is found along the coast of British Columbia and western slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Western red cedars are giants that can grow to 60 m in height, and 3 m in diameter. The Eastern White Cedar, (*T. occidentalis*), found in the Maritimes, Great Lakes, and St. Lawrence forests of Quebec and Ontario, and parts of Manitoba, typically grows to an average of 12 m tall. In Canada there is also Yellow Cedar, scientifically known as *Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*, which, despite its common name, is not a true cedar. It belongs to the *Cupressaceae* family and is more closely related to cypress trees than to true cedars.

**Forest Regions of Canada:** [Click here](#) to view the interactive map (Million Tree Project)

Select the icon to hear the pronunciation of “**Giizhikaatig**” by Elder, Deborah St. Amant.





## How to Spot a Cedar Tree

Out for a Nature Walk? Use these features to identify a Giizhikaatig.

### Eastern White Cedar

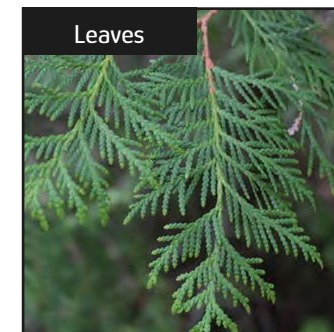
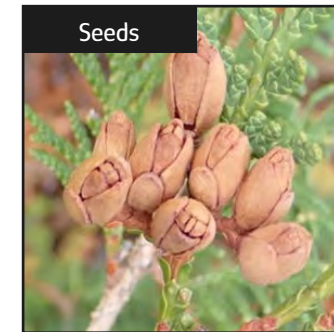
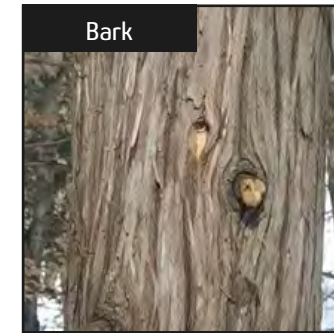
- **Trunk:** Eastern White Cedar grows up to 12-15 metres.
- **Bark:** The bark of the young Eastern White Cedar is thin and reddish brown. On a young tree, it is smooth. It greys in colour on a mature tree, forms narrow flat ridges, and shreds into thin strips hanging off the tree.
- **Branches:** Branches bend slightly downward, gradually turning upward toward tips.
- **Seeds:** Eastern White Cedar produces tiny cones that grow in clusters. The seeds ripen and disperse in early autumn.
- **Leaves:** Scale-like leaves with conspicuous resin glands.

### Did you know?

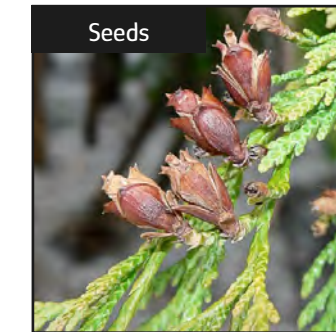
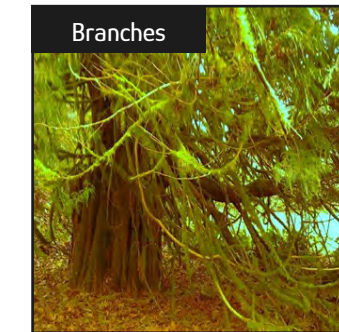
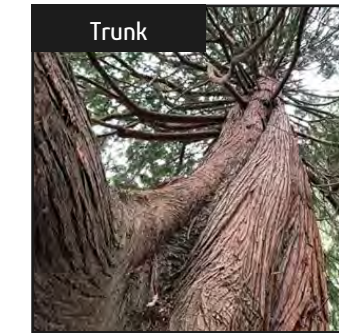


Carbon dating reveals that cedar trees have thrived in southern BC for 6,600 years, while Indigenous communities in BC have been utilizing red cedar for the last 3,000 years.

### Eastern White Cedar



### Western Red Cedar



## Western Red Cedar

- **Trunk:** Straight; up to 60 metres tall when mature, trunk often spreading out widely at the base.
- **Bark:** Grey to cinnamon-red bark, splitting and curling with age.
- **Branches:** Large; drooping branches.
- **Seeds:** Seed cones are egg-shaped, 1 centimetre long, with several pairs of scales. Pollen cones are small and reddish.
- **Leaves:** Scale-like, opposite pairs, in four rows, folded in one pair but not in the other and overlapping like shingles. Arranged on the twigs in flat, fan-like sprays. Powerful aroma.

### Did you know?



All parts of the cedar are used for a variety of purposes. Examples:

**Roots:** Medicine and basket weaving. Can also be pounded and used for clothing and regalia (only 2 roots/ tree).

**Outer Bark:** Tools and roofing. When removing bark, there is a limit to the amount of bark taken. Never remove more than ¼ of the tree bark, and only remove bark from the North side of the tree.

**Inner Bark:** Weaving, clothing and regalia, rope making, medicine, tea for spiritual cleansing rituals.

**Wood:** Planks, shelter, bentwood boxes, poles, canoes, masks, decoration, (modern lumber sales).

**Branch:** Weirs, smoking food, weaponry, bathing, brushing, spiritual cleansing, medicine, lashings and bindings.

**Leaves/Tips:** Edible (when new growth), smudging, medicine, bedding, dyeing, cleaning, rituals.



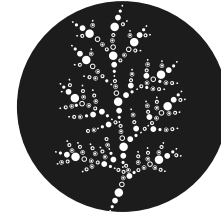
## GIIZHIKAATIG TEACHINGS

We asked Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers to explain, in their own words, what the cedar tree means to them: Grandmother & Knowledge Keeper Diane Maytwayashing describes how cedar trees are integral to their way of life, serving as a vital life force.

“Cedar tea is consumed for its medicinal properties, while ceremonial objects like drums, sacred pipes, and staffs are crafted from cedar wood. Cedar is employed in healing physical ailments through cedar baths. In times of mourning, loved ones are tenderly cleansed with cedar and laid to rest with cedar placed on Mother Earth. Additionally, cedar is utilized in homes to shield against negativity.”



*Image Above: Cedar gathered for ceremonial purposes.  
Image Left: Cedar tree in Eastern Manitoba. Photographs taken and supplied by Knowledge Keeper Diane Maytwayashing.*



## ACTIVITY

Do you live where cedars grow? On your next walk, use the list on the previous pages to spot cedar trees in your neighbourhood. [Click here](#) for more detailed guidelines.

Take a closer look at the leaves and branches: what colours do you see? Are the leaves flat like a fan? Is the bark smooth or rough?

No cedars in your area? Try using photos from Google Image Search. Can you see the differences between the Eastern White and Western Red Cedar trees?

## Did you know?



Western Red Cedar can live up to 1000 years; Eastern White Cedar usually lives for about 200 years, and occasionally much longer.



# AIR NESEWIN



Cedar trees have a unique pollination process: unlike most trees that pollinate in spring, cedars pollinate in winter by releasing pollen into the air right after a cold front.

The aroma of cedar can instantly transport you to an evergreen forest, characterized as warm, woody, and fresh, reminiscent of freshly sharpened pencils, aftershave, and pine-scented cleaning products. This cedarwood scent is a blend of compounds such as thujone, cedrol, and cedrene found in the tree's leaves and bark. Cedrol and thujone contribute to the woody essence, while cedrene adds a touch of freshness.

Cedar has been valued for its therapeutic properties for generations, known for promoting relaxation and alleviating stress and anxiety. While cedar leaves can be gathered year-round, they are most fragrant during the summer months. Indigenous communities have long understood that boiling cedar and inhaling the steam can assist in clearing respiratory infections.

Modern research has confirmed that cedar oil, when used in air duct systems, acts as a potent antimicrobial agent, effectively eliminating bacteria and germs. This offers a safe and environmentally friendly method to purify and sanitize indoor air in our houses and buildings.



## Photosynthesis

Animals get their energy from food, but trees, such as Giizhik, generate their own. Within cedar leaves, carbon dioxide from the air combines with water from the soil and solar energy to produce sugar. This sugar serves as the tree's life-sustaining fuel.

Sugar is also a building block for roots, twigs, and other bits that make up growing trees. Called biomass, these body parts are food for all kinds of animals. Biomass is also a living storage system for carbon. A mature cedar tree (50 - 200 years old) can absorb 48 to 88 pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> yearly, but actual amounts vary based on factors like size and environment. Giant Western Red Cedars have even higher carbon sequestration potential.

## Tree sunscreen

In the winter, when temperatures are low, the rate of photosynthesis decreases and many cedar leaves change colour from green to reddish-brown. The changing of the leaves acts like sunscreen, protecting them from excessive solar radiation during their dormant period.

## Cherished Cedars/Did you know?

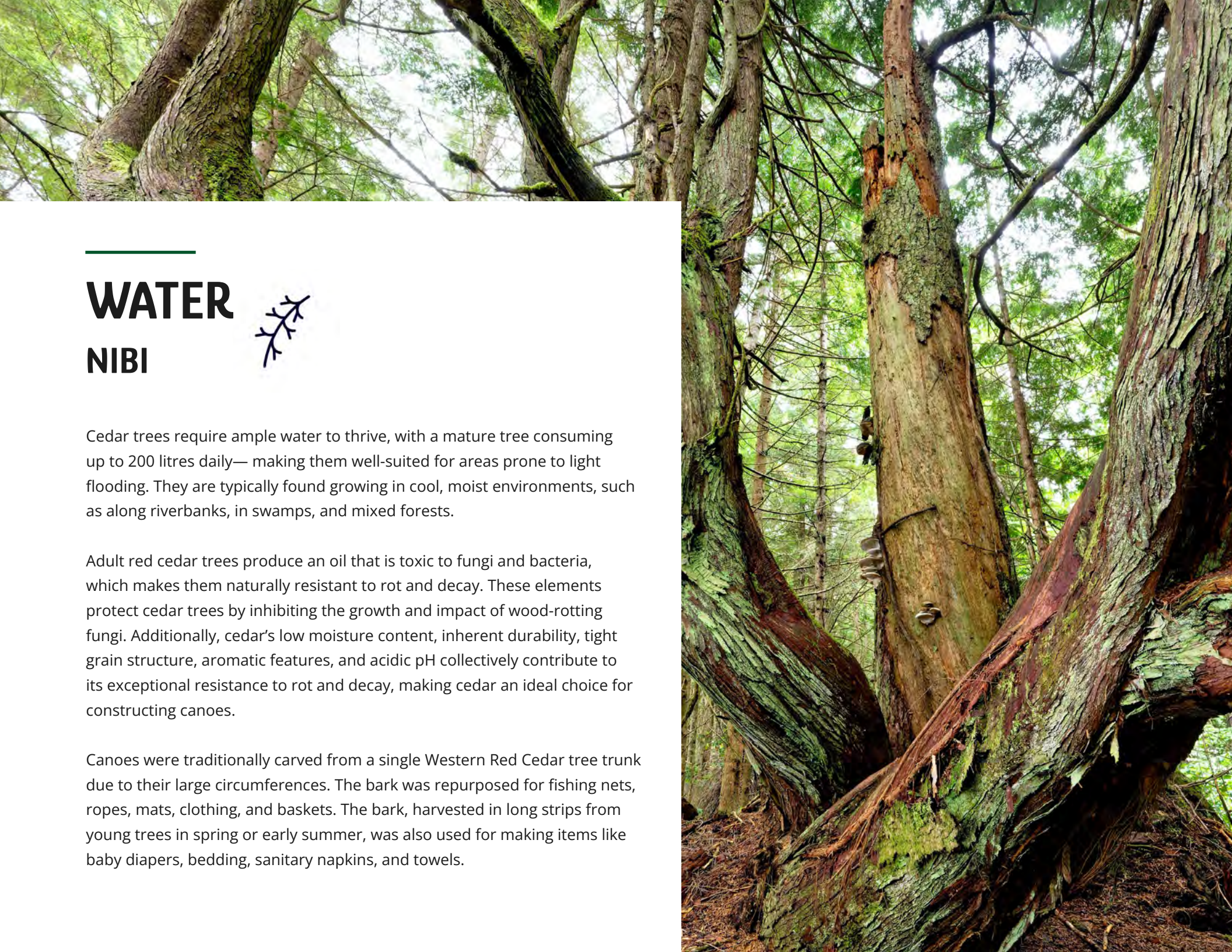
Did you know? Cedar oil is a natural bug repellent. Just like a superhero, it can help shield against annoying bugs like fleas, ticks, and mosquitoes, giving them the cold shoulder in a natural way!



## ACTIVITY

1. Measure the air temperature while standing in the summer sun. Now measure the air temperature under a large tree. Is there a difference? How big?
2. Standing in the open, close your eyes and smell the air. Do the same thing standing in a wooded area. Is there a difference in smell? How would you describe it?
3. Wrap your arms around the tree, and give the tree a big hug. How do you feel? Do you notice any changes in your mood?
4. Can you reach your arms around the tree trunk? How many people would it take to wrap arms around the whole tree? Are there trees around with similar sizes? Tree diameter data can provide essential information about tree and forest health.





# WATER NIBI



Cedar trees require ample water to thrive, with a mature tree consuming up to 200 litres daily— making them well-suited for areas prone to light flooding. They are typically found growing in cool, moist environments, such as along riverbanks, in swamps, and mixed forests.

Adult red cedar trees produce an oil that is toxic to fungi and bacteria, which makes them naturally resistant to rot and decay. These elements protect cedar trees by inhibiting the growth and impact of wood-rotting fungi. Additionally, cedar’s low moisture content, inherent durability, tight grain structure, aromatic features, and acidic pH collectively contribute to its exceptional resistance to rot and decay, making cedar an ideal choice for constructing canoes.

Canoes were traditionally carved from a single Western Red Cedar tree trunk due to their large circumferences. The bark was repurposed for fishing nets, ropes, mats, clothing, and baskets. The bark, harvested in long strips from young trees in spring or early summer, was also used for making items like baby diapers, bedding, sanitary napkins, and towels.

Almost every part of a cedar tree can be harvested, including the roots, bark, and wood. During the Spring season, Indigenous communities traditionally collected cedar when the sap was most abundant. Indigenous Knowledge Keeper and Grandmother Diane Maytwayashing emphasize the importance of honouring traditional knowledge and wisdom by making offerings of tobacco and food to the tree while ensuring minimal damage is done.

In British Columbia, the traditional method of harvesting Western Red Cedar bark involved taking long strips, typically from the shaded side of the tree. Along the BC coast, there are many culturally modified cedar trees (CMTs) that highlight the sustainable harvesting techniques of Indigenous Peoples from the past.

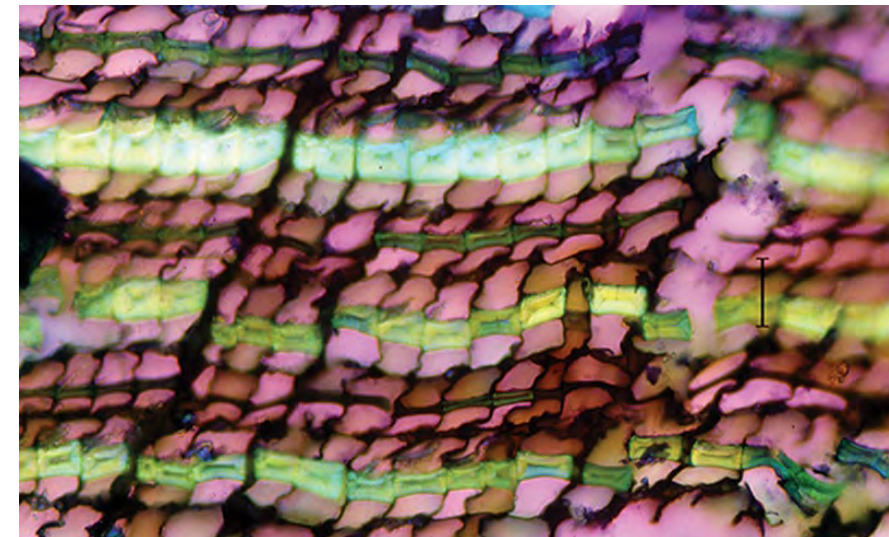
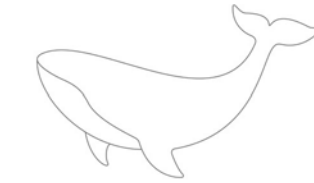


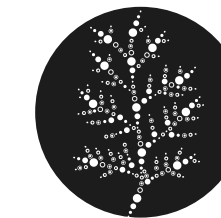
Image: Microscope image of Inner Bark of Cedar, arrow points to red dye, shows rows of fibre. Photo credit: University of British Columbia UBC. Science of cedar.ubc.pdf



## GIIZHIKAATIG TEACHINGS

Did You Know?

The Nuu-chah-nulth people from the western coast of Vancouver Island were known for their traditional whale hunting practices. They expertly constructed canoes, measuring between 10 to 12 metres in length, out of Red Cedar trees. These canoes played a crucial role in whale hunting. The Nuu-chah-nulth people also utilized the bark of the cedar tree to produce strong rope capable of hauling a 16,000 kg whale into the canoe.







# LAND AKI



Amongst a group of three to five friends, Giizhik thrives in deep, moist soil, growing tall and strong towards the light. Cedar maintains a harmonious balance, with roots spreading wide beneath its branches that reach high above. It offers protection and refuge for birds and animals, providing shade and cooling. The aromatic scent of cedar permeates the air, warding off insects and pests, and safeguarding the surrounding life on the forest floor. Cedar's fallen leaves, seeds, branches, and cones replenish the soil providing essential food and nutrients.

Cedars are relatively shallow-rooted trees that often grow with exposed roots, making them susceptible to strong winds that can easily uproot them. However, a fallen hollowed-out cedar trunk can serve as an excellent bear den.

Nestled in British Columbia's ancient woods, a single colossal cedar can host generations of bear cubs. The fun part? Bears unknowingly help the tree's growth! By feeding on salmon and dispersing the remains deep into the forest, they leave behind nitrogen-rich fish carcasses. This natural fertilization process aids the trees in reaching their impressive size. Canadian researchers unveiled the amazing fact that 80% of the nutrients that feed British Columbia's lush forests come from Pacific salmon.



## Did You Know?



Western Red Cedar can increase its biomass and reproduce asexually through a process called layering. When branches or foliage come into contact with moist soil, they can develop roots and grow into new saplings.

## Spotted in the Cedar Forest

Here are just a few of the plants and animals that often live near cedars:

TREES	PLANTS	AMPHIBIANS	MAMMALS	BIRDS	INSECTS/INVERTEBRATES
Alder	Ferns	Frogs	Moose, White-tailed deer, elk	Eagles	Butterflies
Douglas Fir	Mosses, lichens, and fungi	Toads	Bears	Northern Waw-whet owls	Beetles
Douglas Fir	Foam flower	Red-backed salamanders	Wolves, coyotes	Ravens	Bees
Hemlock	Huckleberry (Vaccinium spp.)	Garter snakes	Cougars	Woodpeckers	Ants
Jack Pine	Columbine (Aquilegia spp.)		Raccoons	Cedar Waxwings	Anthropods
Sitka Spruce			Porcupines	Blue Jays/ Mountain Jays	Spiders
Eastern White Pine			Rabbits and hares	Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers	
Tamarack			Red squirrels		
Balsam Fir					

## Did You Know?



Canada boasts the Western Red Cedar, also recognized as the Cheewhat Giant or Cheewhat Lake Cedar, as its largest tree and one of the world's largest. Situated within the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve on the coast of British Columbia, this impressive tree is 55.5 metres tall with a diameter of 6.1 metres.

## Cherished Cedars



[Click here](#) to watch British Columbian Haida artist Bill Reid, jeweller and wood carver, work on a totem pole in the Haida tradition. The film shows the gradual transformation of a bare cedar trunk into a richly carved pole, a gift...



## Cherished Cedars

In Ontario, a unique Eastern White Cedar thrives on the cliffs of Lion's Head, Bruce Peninsula National Park. This extraordinary tree is considered the oldest in Ontario; estimates suggest it sprouted in the year 688 AD, making it over 1330 years old.

Estimating the age of a cedar tree based on its width or height can be challenging due to the inconsistent growth patterns of cedars throughout their lifetimes. Factors such as environmental conditions, competition for resources, and genetic diversity can influence their growth rates. As a result, two cedars with similar widths may differ greatly in age due to their unique growth behaviours. To accurately determine a tree's age, scientists look at the tree's inner growth rings; trees grow from the inside out. This study is called Dendrochronology.

## WHAT IS DENDROCHRONOLOGY?

Dendrochronology, the science of tree rings, doesn't just explain the age of the tree. It can explain what the ecosystem, climate, and weather were like hundreds of years ago, and point out periods of drought, flood. A cedar that is thousands of years old can tell us a lot about climate change and what life was like in Canada during that time. They also tell the story of how forests were managed before settlers arrived and the changes that took place at the time of colonization.

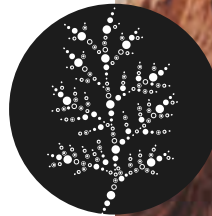


*Image: This tree at Lion's head is over 1300 years-old, it is the second oldest tree known in Ontario.*

*Source: [Ontario's old-growth forests](#)*

## GIIZHIK TEACHINGS

In Surrey, BC, there is a remarkable Western Red Cedar tree known as the "Rock Tree." This tree, which grew through a massive glacial boulder measuring 2m x 3m, is not only a protected historic site but also holds significance as a sacred site for the Stó:lō Nation. They named it 'Th'exsiyamia,' which translates to 'pushing forward great respected one.'



## ACTIVITIES

Take a walk in the woods and look for tree stumps.

Here are just a few of the things you could observe and document:

- How old is this tree?
- What year was this tree "born" or did it start to grow?
- How many years of drought did this tree go through?
- How many years look like they might have had extra rain?
- Does it look like the tree went through any sort of trauma? How can you tell?
- Based on what you can see from the tree rings, tell a story about this tree's life!

Imagine yourself as a tree, and create your own tree ring story/art.

What's your tree ring story? Create a piece of art that maps out your unique growth.

## Canada's Cedar Industry

The cedar industry in Canada contributes significantly to the country's economy, generating billions per year in revenue from exports and supporting thousands of jobs. Cedar trees, particularly, are harvested for their high-quality timber. This timber is used in a wide range of applications, including construction, furniture making, decking, fencing, and boat building.

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# MOTHER EARTH

## MAMA AKI

Giizhik holds great significance for many Indigenous communities throughout Canada and all Canadians. Yet, like all of nature, cedars face threats from climate change. Climate change can significantly impact cedar trees in Canada, affecting their growth, health, distribution, and overall viability.

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## GIIZHIK TEACHINGS

*Giizhik teaches us:*

- To be grateful
- Never to take the first, the last, or too much from the natural world
- To preserve medicines and resources for seven generations to come

*Following these teachings will help us fight climate change—protecting Giizhik, our Mother the Earth, and all our relations.*

🗣️ [Click here](#) to learn more about the importance of Giizhik's gifts and how it is used in the "Four Sacred Medicines: Cedar, Sage, Sweetgrass & Tobacco".

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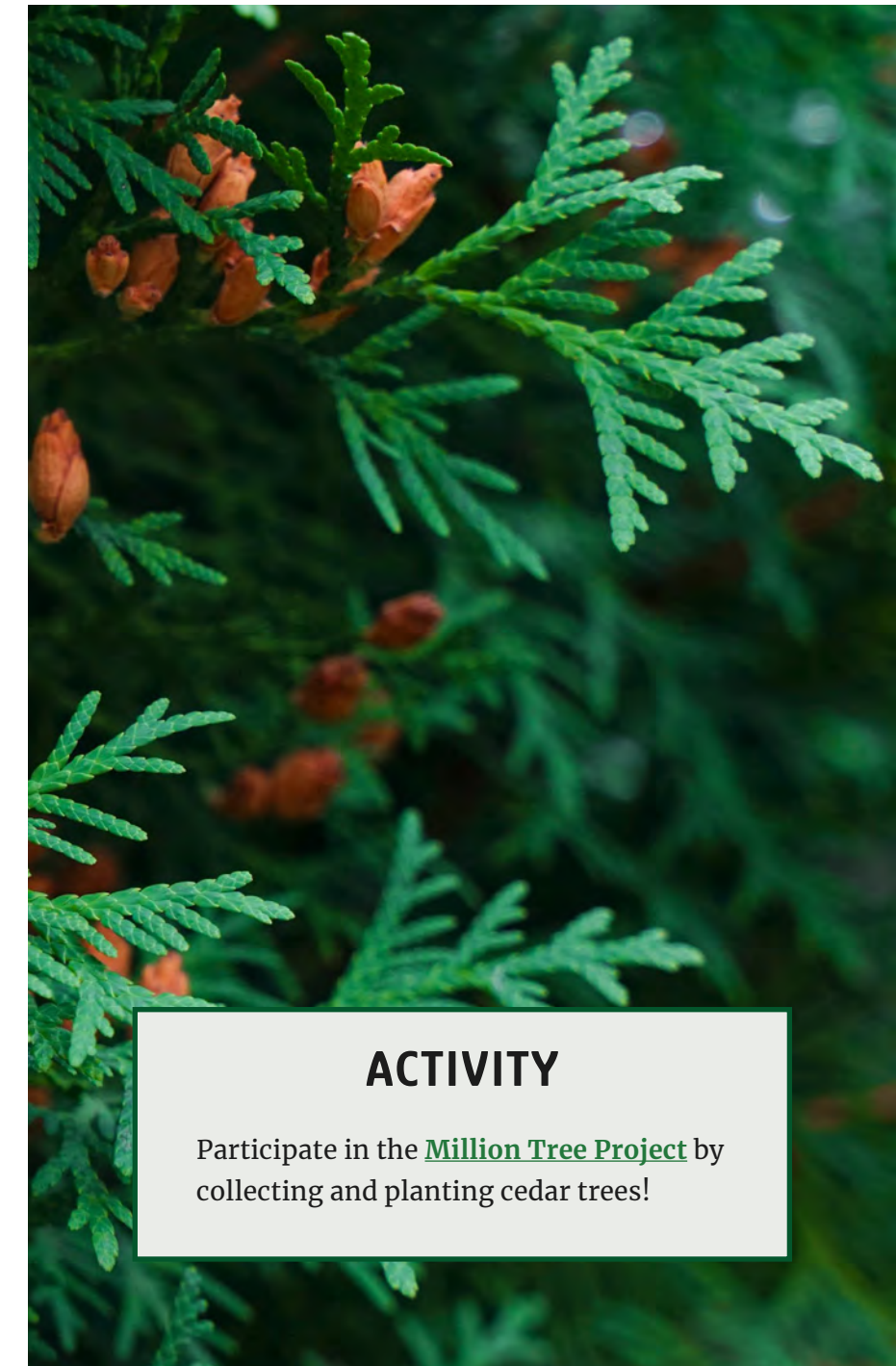


## How Climate Affects the Cedar Trees

Cedars are highly sensitive to drought. While they can endure seasonal droughts or occasional heatwaves, experiencing multiple events in quick succession can reduce the tree's water retention capacity, hinder its growth, and weaken its defense against pests and diseases. For example, the Western Red Cedar borer is a pest that infiltrates the tree internally, causing damage that often goes unnoticed until it's too late.

In times of drought, cedars save water, resulting in stunted growth and evident signs such as withering branches, yellowing and browning leaves, and sometimes the demise of the tree's upper section. If a drought lingers or intense heat persists over a prolonged period, the entire tree could die. However, recent studies reveal that younger trees are more susceptible to drought than older ones, underscoring the importance of safeguarding old-growth or ancient forests.

The ancient forests that house Western Red Cedars are situated within the Pacific Northwest temperate rainforests, a distinct and scarce ecosystem. This environment stores a larger amount of carbon in its biomass, making the safeguarding and preservation of the ancient cedars a crucial part of our fight against climate change.



## ACTIVITY

Participate in the [Million Tree Project](#) by collecting and planting cedar trees!

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# FURTHER READING

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