February Tree-of-the-Month

California Incense Cedar
*Calocedrus decurrens*

Do you know where pencils comes from?

They start from the wood of California incense cedar, a large and handsome evergreen tree. The wood is pale brown and aromatic. It is also very durable and used to make other useful items such as fencing, shingles and cedar chests.

Don’t be confused by the name—this isn’t a true cedar (*Cedrus*). Its botanical name is *Calocedrus* meaning beautiful cedar.

How pencils are made:

1. The trees are harvested and cut into thin 7”-long slats.

2. Grooves are cut into each slat to hold graphite writing cores.

3. A second grooved slat is glued on top of the core-filled slat.

4. Then a machine shapes and cuts each side slat “sandwich” into individual pencils.

*For more information visit: dixonticonderoga.com*
**Needles and Cones**

The branchlets of California incense cedar are similar to *Chamaecyparis* and *Thuja* but flattened and positioned vertically. Their needles are scalelike leaves, overlapping and elongated.

In early autumn, *Calocedrus* begins to initiate reproductive systems. The tips of the growing branchlets convert from vegetative to floral branches. By early winter, male, or staminate cones (1) mature and produce pollen which lands on female, or pistillate tips, which then ripen into seed bearing cones (2) the following autumn and the process starts again.

**Anthesis**: the period during which a flower is fully open and functional or the period of pollen-shedding.

**Letterboxing!**

Letterboxing is a fun way to find California incense cedars at the Arboretum.

**To find the letterbox, follow these directions:**

- Go to the intersection of Valley Road and Conifer Path.
- Continue walking downhill on Valley Road past the puddingstone outcrop on the right.
- Look for the unmarked path forking off to the right. Go in this direction.
- Almost immediately you will see a stone culvert is on your left. From the large stone at the end of the wall next to the path continue straight downhill and ahead 100 steps. Keep left of the *Carpinus* trees or duck under their branches.
- In front of you is a tall evergreen California incense cedar accession # 292-80*A.
- In the crook of the tree, between the beautiful double trunks, you’ll find the letterbox. Follow the directions inside and leave everything just as you found it.
- If you want to see more trees, go to http://arboretum.harvard.edu/explorer/ and use the Menu to search accession # 4000. Here you’ll find 3 old trees near the top of Hemlock Hill.