

# Littleton Cou

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## Live Free or Dig with the Littleton Garden Club *Cedar and false cedar*

BY MARY BINGMAN

Littleton Garden Club

From my window, I look out on a 60-year-old Arborvitae hedge. It is about 35-40 feet tall and provides ample screening between our driveway and our neighbor's backyard. I think of them as "cedars," but they are really "false cedars."

True cedars are known as *Cedrus* (family Pinaceae). They are native to the mountainous areas of the Mediterranean region, and one is native to the western Himalayas. I was surprised to learn that there are only four types of true cedars: *Cedrus atlantica*, *Cedrus brevifolia*, *Cedrus deodara*, and *Cedrus libani*.

The false cedar, or Northern White Cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*), is native to our region and is a popular land-

scaping tree commonly called Arborvitae.

These evergreens have aromatic wood like "true cedars." Also, the wood is decay-resistant and insect-repelling. They do best in full sun, and their needles are flat and scaly.

Historically, the Arborvitae was known as the "tree of life." Native Americans taught Jacques Cartier how to use the tree's vitamin C-rich foliage to treat scurvy. Later, the tree was introduced to Europe for cultivation, and now there are popular dwarf varieties as well.

Northern white cedars provide wildlife with many opportunities. Black bears strip the soft, insect-repelling bark for bedding in their dens. Birds and squirrels build nests in the dense foliage and find protection from high wind. Deer seek out

less snow build-up, and these trees provide that for bedding down.

Young false cedars provide winter browse, which becomes a huge problem for many homeowners. Deer love munching on Arborvitae trees! It's one of the few remaining plants left to snack on in winter. Repellent spray can control this.

Sprays that contain eggs work well because deer can't stand the smell. It must be reapplied immediately after rain or snow. To me, it's like a winter hobby!

We discovered that cedar oil can be aggressive towards ticks because it attacks their respiratory system. Trying to be "tick vigilant, we went through a large and somewhat expensive spray bottle this season. That spray routine was paired with

permethrin-treated work clothes. A bonus is that cedar oil smells so much better than most insecticides.

Cedar wood used in closets and hope chests has moth-repellent qualities. It loses its aroma over time but can be restored by sanding away the wood's top layer. This practice may need to be repeated every few years to return the characteristic cedar scent.

I have a great fondness for the Arborvitaes out my window. A favorite morning moment is seeing sparrows and warblers emerge from their cozy, protected living wall. The squirrels built an impressive nest in there as well. Sometimes, a flash of red happens. Our local elusive cardinal pair quickly retreats to their hideaway in the safety of the false cedar hedge.