

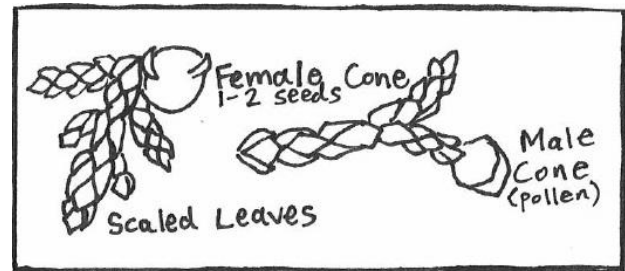


## Utah Juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*)

“...an old juniper stood in the clearing, deeply rooted and gnarled. I had never seen such a knowledgeable tree. Perhaps it was the silver sheen of its shredded bark that reminded me of my grandmother, her windblown hair in the desert, her weathered face, the way she held me as a child. I wanted to climb into the arms of this tree.”

-Terry Tempest Williams

**Description:** Loose ribbons of silver-tinted bark spiral down the reddish-brown trunks of mature Utah Junipers. This bushy evergreen grows between 10 and 30 feet tall and often has a rounded crown. Large quantities of pale blue berries with a dusty white finish dot the foliage. These “berries” are actually female cones that contain 1-2 hard seeds for which the Juniper received its Latin name: *osteosperma* or “bone-seed.” Tiny, intricate scales cover leaves that are 1/8” long and smell spicy and sweet when crushed in the fingers.



juniper cone detail



**Location:** Utah Juniper is the most common tree in the Great Basin ecosystem, one of three ecosystems that meet in the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve. Look for Utah Juniper in the company of Pinyon Pine at Red Mountain and Yant Flat in higher-elevation portions of the Reserve. The tree grows at elevations between 4,000 and 7,500 feet, typically on plains and plateaus with well-drained, alkaline soil. Junipers concentrate limited soil moisture and organic material beneath their canopies creating nutrient rich (comparatively speaking) islands of higher fertility.

Great Basin juniper-sage mix

**History:** Today, pinyon-juniper woodlands cover millions of acres in the southwest and account for up to 15% of the land area in Utah. The range and density of this forest has increased dramatically in the last 150 years. Grazing by cattle and sheep reduced the density of grasses and other plants that could have competed with juniper seedlings for resources. Now, junipers dominate areas that used to be open grassland. Additionally, more junipers have survived to adulthood in the last century because of the suppression of natural fire regimes.

**Uses:** In the high-desert ecosystem, Utah Junipers provide shelter and cover for mule deer and bighorn sheep. Juniper “berries” provide food for jackrabbits, foxes, coyotes and many birds. Southwestern Native American tribes used decoctions made from twigs and “berries” to treat coughs and colds. Branches were used in sweat baths to ease the pain of rheumatism. The sturdy, decay-resistant wood made great fence posts, and hundreds of miles of juniper fencing once crisscrossed rangeland in the west. Today, campers favor Utah Juniper branches because they make for a cheery, crackling fire and release an incense-like fragrance when heated. “Berries” from the related species, Common Juniper, have long been used to flavor gin.