



TAXUS BACCATA L.

Fam. Taxaceae

DESCRIPTION

Very long-lived evergreen conifer, that averages 10 metres in height though some trees can even exceed 20 metres.

DISTRIBUTION

This plant is native to the countries on the shores of the Mediterranean.

FLOWERS

Flowering occurs between January and May. Pollination is anemophilous (distributed by wind), while the seeds are transported far away by animals, especially birds.

FRUTTI

The plant produces edible and fleshy red berries (arils) which, however, enclose a small, dark and poisonous seed.

BARK

Long, stiff, robust and reddish stems.

LEAVES

The acicular leaves are vivid green – similar to those of firs –, flat and translucent.

INTERESTING FACTS

Taxus baccata is both a dioecious (with separate sexes) and monoecious plant. Yew is commonly used as a hedge plant or as a solitary tree in parks and gardens. All parts of the *Taxus baccata*, including the bark, leaves and seeds, are poisonous and, in severe intoxications, it can provoke death. The fruits, however, called arils, are an excellent food for birds; when ripe, they turn red. Not surprisingly, yew is known as the “tree of death”: in fact, it contains taxin, a toxic alkaloid which, if ingested, causes nausea, vomiting, cardio-respiratory failure and, in high dosage, even coma and death. Its active ingredients are effectively used in the treatment of ovarian cancer.

