Dawn Redwood

Metasequoia glyptostroboides

The story behind the tree on the Arnold Arboretum logo

A living fossil

Metasequoia grew on earth more than 55 million years ago. Paleobotanists (scientists who study ancient and extinct plant life) believed this plant to be extinct. The only evidence ever found of Metasequoia was fossils that dated back millions of years. These fossils were discovered in both Asia and North America.

In 1941, a Chinese botanist exploring the interior of his country noticed a large tree in a remote village with a small shrine at its base. The villagers worshiped a god they believed lived inside the tree, and the botanist realized the tree was something special. Scientists around the world examined samples from the tree and confirmed that it was the Metasequoia that had previously only been known by the fossils.

Seeds were collected on later expeditions and a large grove of dawn redwoods was discovered deep in an isolated valley. The Arboretum was the first North American institution to receive these seeds and was instrumental in distributing them to botanical gardens and universities around the world.
What’s in a name?
Try to pronounce it: met-uh-seh-KWOY-uh glip-toe-stroe-BOY-deez

The word **Metasequoia** comes from the Greek and means “looks like a **Sequoia**” and **Glyptostrobus** is another rare Chinese conifer with similar looking foliage (the word means “carved cone”).

There does not seem to be any record of when or where the common name was arrived at but it would be a fair guess that “dawn” came from it being a fossil from the dawn of time.

The other redwoods are native to the western United States: **Sequoia sempervirens** (coast redwood) and **Sequoiadendron giganteum** (giant sequoia). The Arnold Arboretum includes **Sequoiadendron** in its collection.

Not all conifers are evergreen

**Metasequoia** is a deciduous conifer. This means that unlike most cone-bearing trees, the needles change color and drop off in autumn. Other deciduous conifers include **Larix** (larch) and **Taxodium** (baldcypress).

**Metasequoia** will become very large. Estimations of a mature tree growing in the United States is 100’ tall and at least 40’ wide. It is a relatively fast grower and can grow as much as three feet a year when growing conditions are favorable. The tallest **Metasequoia** in China is 120 feet tall.

LOOK at the bark and the trunk

When the needles have fallen from the tree, the butressed trunk is more noticeable. It looks prehistoric, like the leg of a woolly mammoth. What else do you see?

COUNT

There are a total of 97 **Metasequoia glyptostroboides** here at the Arnold Arboretum.

How many can you count near the Hunnewell Building Visitor Center?