



# Juniper

(*Juniperus communis*)

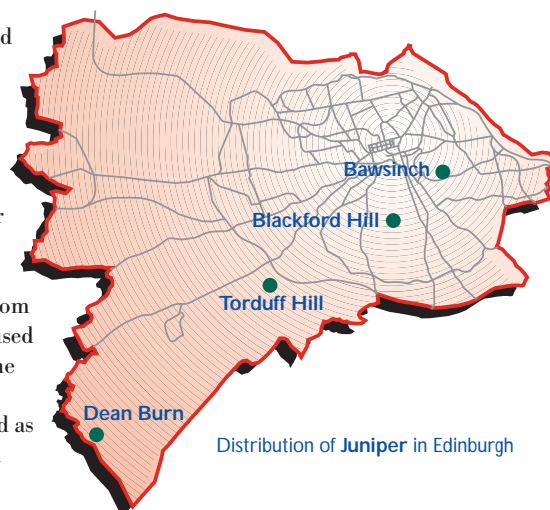
## STATUS & ECOLOGY

Juniper is one of the three British native conifers. There are three sub-species, with frequent intermediates: the lowland form *Juniperus communis ssp. communis* and the mountain form *Juniperus communis ssp. nana*. Overall, juniper has an extensive, but rather discontinuous distribution, and it forms a component of a number of British plant communities.

The two main populations are centred on the Scottish Highlands and the chalk downs of southern England. However, it can also be found at lower densities in northern England, the Scottish borders, north Wales, and the west coast of Ireland. There are only 21 recorded juniper locations in Lothian, including Torduff Hill, Blackford Hill, Bawsinch and along the Dean Burn, within Edinburgh. UK figures suggest a 60% overall decline up to 1960, but the data are incomplete.

Although known to grow as a tree, juniper is often classified as a shrub. The lowland form is more frequently found growing upright and has prickly leaves. Whereas the mountain juniper is more often prostrate or procumbent and rarely has prickly leaves. Junipers are widely planted and maintained as an ornamental plant in parks and gardens, and are available in a wide range of species and horticultural forms. It is mainly alien species that are widely cultivated. Juniper is not generally used as a timber species, other than in wood turning. Its main commercial value derives from juniper berries, which are used in the production of gin. The plant is also used in herbal medicine, aromatherapy, and as a flavouring or marinade in cooking.

Juniper scrub is recognised as a nationally scarce woodland type in SSSI designation guidelines. Inclusion in the EC Habitat and Species Directive 1992 acknowledges juniper's threatened European status. It receives general protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.



*“Blue burns the cone, blue burns the cone  
Of the low branching juniper tree”*  
Wilfred Watson

## FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

### Impacts

Apart from the direct clearance of stands for other land-use purposes, grazing has had the greatest impact on juniper numbers and distribution. Excessive sheep, cattle and rabbit grazing prevent the establishment of young bushes and thereby limit juniper regeneration. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that sheep will not eat mature juniper due to its high concentration of terpenes, and that the grazing of young foliage may open up bushes to the effects of severe winds and cold. Sheep also tend to trample smaller plants, use taller bushes for rubbing posts, and increase compaction by sheltering under low shrubs.

### Threats

Overgrazing remains a concern. Conversely however, insufficient grazing can also reduce the area suitable for juniper regeneration as tree recruitment can lead to increased shading. Burning, whether accidental, malicious, or as a management tool, may also destroy young regeneration and adult bushes.



## CURRENT ACTION

A national Juniper Action Plan has been prepared as part of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. This seeks to maintain the present range and overall population size of juniper by restoring existing stands and re-establishing others. Although there is no co-ordinated programme for the conservation of juniper in Edinburgh, the City of Edinburgh Council has been planting juniper as part of its urban forestry programme and selective planting has been undertaken by countryside rangers in the Pentland Hills Regional Park.

## ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

### Objectives

To maintain existing juniper populations in Edinburgh and extend its number and distribution through new planting.

### Targets

To map the locations, and actively manage, existing juniper stands in Edinburgh. To include juniper, where appropriate, within new woodland establishment projects.

## Actions

### 1 Identify and map the locations of juniper populations in Edinburgh by Summer 2000.

(Actioned by: Royal Botanic Garden, Lothian Wildlife Information Centre & Local Naturalist)

### 2 Encourage and implement management practices, by Spring 2001, that will conserve existing juniper populations.

(Actioned by: City of Edinburgh Council Recreation Department, Pentland Hills Regional Park & Scottish Wildlife Trust)

### 3 Include, from Winter 2001, juniper in appropriate new woodland establishment projects and new planting on golf courses, public parks and similarly managed sites.

(Actioned by: City of Edinburgh Council Departments of Recreation & City Development, Pentland Hills Regional Park, Edinburgh Green Belt Trust & Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group)

## Key Contacts

City of Edinburgh Council (City Development)  
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Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh  
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Scottish Wildlife Trust  
Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group  
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## CHAMPIONS

