

A Wollemi Pine imposter?

Cephalotaxus fortunei 三尖杉

Chinese Plum Yew *or*
Fortune's Plum Yew



Cephalotaxus fortunei
Chinese Plum Yew

When the Wollemi Pine was first discovered, such was its similarity to an evergreen conifer from the forests of central and south-western China, that it was thought to be a garden escapee, the Chinese Plum Yew (*Cephalotaxus fortunei*). However, the Wollemi Pine is a magnificent tall tree;

the imposter, the Chinese Plum Yew, grows as a shrub, or at most a small tree, 4 - 5 metres tall.

The name, Plum Yew, refers to leaves that are not unlike those of Yew trees (*Taxus* spp.) and the fleshy arils on female plants resemble small plums¹. The Plum Yew was introduced to Britain in 1848 by the Scottish plant collector,



Wollemi Pine

Robert Fortune, who infamously orchestrated the illegal shipment of tea plants (*Camellia sinensis*) from China to India for the British East India Company². And of course, *Cephalotaxus fortunei* was named after Fortune. It is widely planted in cool, temperate parks and gardens of the world.

There are ~ 11 species in the genus *Cephalotaxus*, all from eastern Asia, from the Himalayas, through China to Japan and south to the Malay Peninsula. There is also fossil evidence that the genus was once more widely distributed throughout the Northern Hemisphere¹.

Look for the Chinese Plum Yew in the eastern extension of the Biological Sciences Courtyard Garden.

¹http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cephalotaxus_fortunei

²http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Fortune

Map: modified from *Encyclopedia of Life*: <http://eol.org/pages/1059913/maps>

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Natural distribution of *Cephalotaxus fortunei*, the Chinese Plum Yew, in central and south-western China.