

Topic: Taxus; External Morphology
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Distribution, Habit and Habitat:

The genus is represented by nine species (Dallimore and Jackson, 1948) viz. *Taxus baccata*, *T. brevifolia*, *T. canadensis*, *T. chinensis*, *T. cuspidata*, *T. floridana*, *T. globosa*, *T. hunnewelliana* and *T. media*. Those are distributed over Europe, North America, Asia and extend up to Malaysia.

Taxus baccata L., is a small tree that grows in the Himalayas in India. It grows in moist and shady places above 1,800 metres all along the Himalayas, Khasi-Jaintia hills and Naga Hills and may grow up to a height of twenty metres and in diameter up to 7 metres, In India the usual height attained by this species varies between 9-20 metres.

In India, *Taxus* occurs both in the eastern as well as western Himalayas in Khasi and Naga hills, Assam, Manipur, Simla and several

other areas at an altitude of about 1800 metres or more above sea level. Raizada and Sahni (1960) recognized a tenth species of *Taxus* (*T. wallichiana*) growing in Himalayas.

Morphological Features of *Taxus*:

- *Taxus baccata*, commonly known as 'Yew', is an evergreen tree attaining a height of 9-20 metres with a massive trunk.
- The stem is profusely branched and remains covered with a thin brown-coloured bark.
 - It differs from *Pinus* in not possessing dimorphic branches.
 - All the branches are of unlimited growth and form a very dense canopy, thus making *Taxus* a shade-providing tree.

- Only the green leaves are present on the vegetative branches.
- The leaves are linear, small, only 2-3 cm. long and spirally arranged. Each leaf possesses a single strong vein and recurved margins.
- The upper surface is dark green while the lower surface is pale or rusty red in colour.
- The apex is sharply pointed mainly because of accumulation of silica. This sharply pointed apex may cause death of cattles eating these leaves.
- Each leaf is shortly stalked. The stalk broadens into a flat persistent base which shows a slight twist.
- The scaly leaves present on the fertile shoot are opposite and

- decussate. *Taxus* possesses a long and well- developed tap-root. The roots are deep-feeders and highly branched.

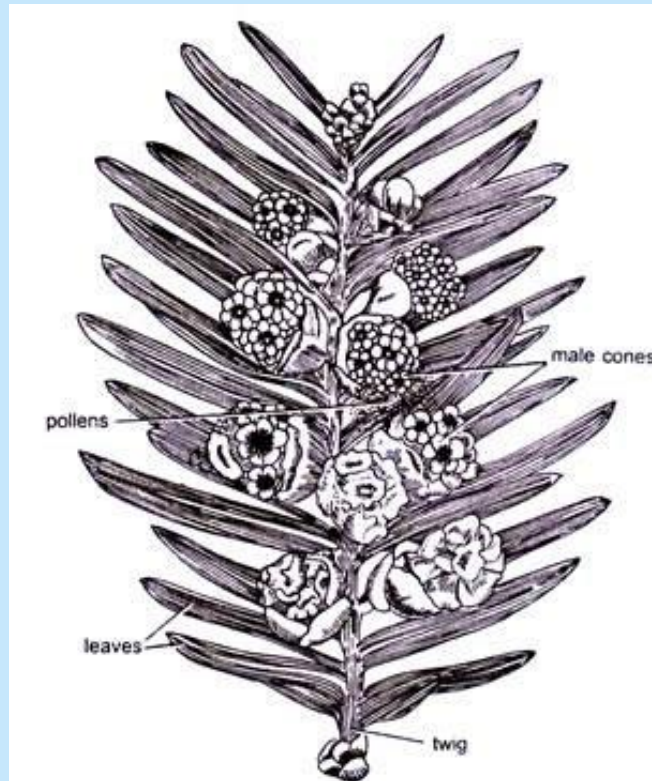


Fig. A twig of *Taxus baccata* bearing male cones at different stages of development.