

Bishop Pine (*Pinus muricata*)



Summary:

The bishop pine is native to California and was discovered near Mission San Luis Obispo, hence its name. These pines have a limited range, with the majority found towards the California coast and a few offshore islands. You can find a large population of bishop pines nearby at Point Reyes. They often cohabitate with other native trees in the region, such as redwoods here in northern California, and are drought-tolerant (Calscape 2026).

Bishop pines are considered medium to large-sized trees, and can grow to be anywhere from 15-25 meters, and can reach over 35 meters on rare occasions. Their trunks reach a diameter of up to 1.2 meters. The closer they are to the coast, the more stunted they will be. This is due to the bishop pine thriving in dry, rocky soil (Calscape 2026). They are also characterized by their rounded crowns and long, greyish-green needles (California Flora Nursery 2026).

Bishop Pines and Fire

Bishop pines are a fire-dependent, serotinous pine species, but are not considered to be fire-resistant. Cones are produced each year, but remain closed until they are opened by fire or, rarely, by an especially hot day. The fire regime in bishop pine forests, such as that at Point Reyes, typically results in stand replacement (NPS 2024). Even low-intensity fires can kill mature trees, allowing their seeds to disperse onto the newly burned ground to germinate. Due to their ecology, bishop pine stands tend to be even-aged, and as a result, are extremely dense the first 10 – 20 years after fire. If a tree is never exposed to fire, it is likely to succumb to a disease instead, adding an additional layer of vulnerability and fire potential (NPS 2024).



References:

California Flora Nursery. 2026. "Pinus Muricata ." Calfloranursery.com.
<https://www.calfloranursery.com/plants/pinus-muricata>.

Calscape. 2026. "Bishop Pine." Calscape.org. [https://calscape.org/Pinus-muricata-\(Bishop-Pine\)](https://calscape.org/Pinus-muricata-(Bishop-Pine)).

National Park Service (NPS). 2024. "Fire Ecology - Vegetation Types: Bishop Pine Forests - Point Reyes National Seashore (U.S. National Park Service)." Nps.gov. February 5, 2024.
https://www.nps.gov/pore/learn/nature/wildlandfire_fireecology_vegtypes_bishoppine.htm.

Photos: California Flora Nursery