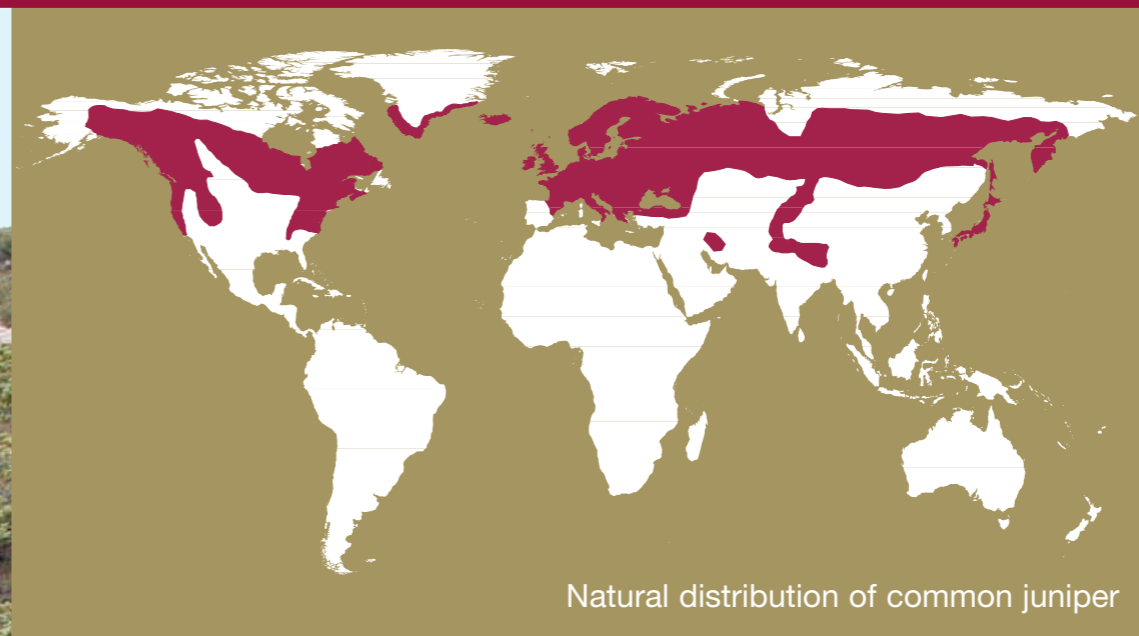


Common juniper *Juniperus communis*



Common juniper growing wild in Turkey.



Natural distribution of common juniper

The juniper's small, prickly leaves are backed with silver. The black fruits also have a greyish bloom.

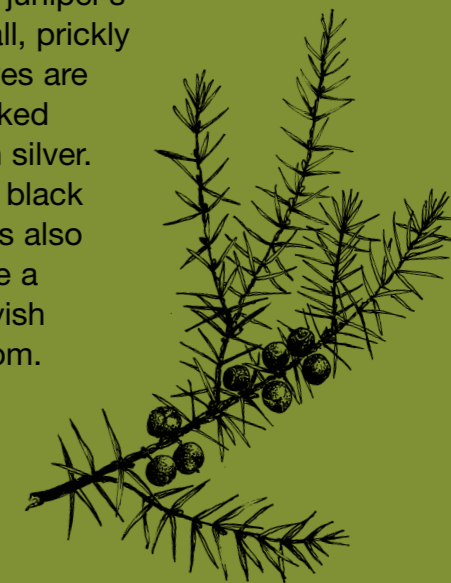


illustration by John White

Ice and a slice?

Juniper has been part of human life for centuries - the spiny branches were even used as an early form of barbed wire. However, since the seventeenth century its major use has been rather more enjoyable: the 'berries' are used to flavour gin.

Junipers can also be very attractive garden plants and there are many different varieties available. Bedgebury is home to the NCCPG (National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens) National Collection of junipers, a comprehensive 'living gene bank' containing most of the known varieties. The collection protects rare varieties from extinction and is also a useful resource for gardeners.

Having a collection like this is an important 'insurance policy' because wild juniper in the UK is becoming very scarce, partly due to overgrazing and partly because the population contains many old plants that do not reproduce well.

Did you know?

Common juniper is one of only three native conifers. It is the most widely distributed tree or shrub in the Northern Hemisphere.