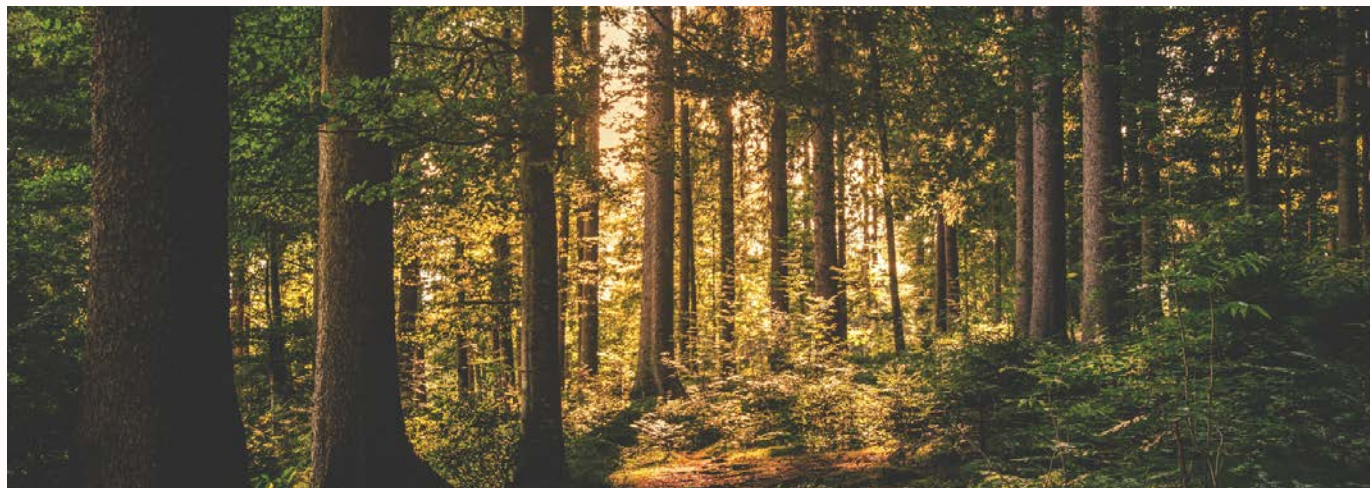


THE OUTSIDER

Illinois Extension Horticulture serving Henry, Mercer Rock Island and Stark



THEY ARE NOT ALL PINE TREES

As the leaves of deciduous trees fall, evergreens take center stage in our landscape and, for those celebrating Christmas, we bring one or more into our homes. The keen observer will notice that evergreen trees come in a variety of shapes and sizes, yet so many times are all referred to as pine trees. This is an error made, more than once, in my presence by loved ones who will remain nameless. Therefore, please allow me a few pages of space and a few moments to set the record straight. They are not all pine trees.

PINE

Pine trees (*Pinus* spp.) are, perhaps, the most well-known of many evergreen trees that live in our communities. Pine trees are easily distinguished from other evergreen conifers by needle clusters usually in groups of two, three or five. The number of leaves in a cluster can help indicate the species. Eastern White pine (*P. strobus*) is a tall, elegant tree with fragrant needles in clusters of five. Pine trees are monoecious and often hold mature cones on the trees until fire stratification. Compared to other conifers, pine species can withstand warmer, dryer conditions. Overall, pine trees prefer full sun, and don't do well with urban pollution but are more tolerant of urban soils than spruce or fir. Pine trees are naturally diverse in shape and size however many cultivars are available for greater predictability in the home landscape.



White Pine

White Pine (*P. strobus*) is a beautiful, beloved tree in eastern North America, so much so that Michigan and Maine have named it their state tree (North Carolina has adopted *Pinus* spp. as state tree). Traditionally conical in shape, White Pine becomes irregular with age. Relatively fast growing, White Pine can grow one to three feet each year. Other species to consider for the landscape include Limber pine (*Pinus flexilis*) and Mugo Pine (*Pinus mugo*).



FIR

Fir trees (*Abies* spp.) do well in northern Illinois on sites that provide well drained soil. One of the distinguishing identification characteristics of fir (*Abies*) from spruce (*Picea*) is the softness of the flat needles, spruce needles are sharp and stiff. One could, dare we say should, hug a fir. Another identifying characteristic is the position of the cones, fir species have cones positioned upright on branches while spruce species cones droop. A less obvious but interesting way to identify a fir is by the citrus fragrance of crushed leaves.

Abies concolor (Concolor fir or White fir) is a good choice for northern Illinois. Somewhat tolerant of drought, salt, heat and air pollution. This tree is a good choice for most landscapes where well drained soil and full sun are available. The densely pyramidal form is attractive and maintains this form for nearly all its life. Concolor fir is a nice alternative to Blue Spruce (*Picea pungens*), which is vulnerable to needle cast.

JUNIPER

Aptly named, Common Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) is found throughout the Northern Hemisphere on a wide array of sites. Tolerant of dry, rocky sites to woodland hillsides to acid marshlands, Common Juniper is a friend to even the most unexperienced Outsider. In addition to adaptability, this species can be found in a wide variety of forms and with a variety of foliage colors. Some selections are narrow, upright columns such as 'Compressa' or 'Gold Cone' while others spread along the ground with no ambition to reach any significant height such as 'Green Carpet' or 'Aurea'. No matter the form, a trivia fact not to be overlooked is the use of Juniper berries as a flavoring for gin.

"Laughter is the joyous
universal evergreen of life."
- Abraham Lincoln



ARBORVITAE

Thuja occidentalis, while one of six species, is the most widely available and usually what people mean when they use the common name Arborvitae. This species is native to northern North America and is one of the few evergreens that will tolerate sites with more moisture. Without the assistance of cultivation, *T. occidentalis* is a pyramidal tree often with multiple stems. This form makes it susceptible to branch breaking under heavy snow loads. Similar to Common Juniper, many cultivars of *T. occidentalis* have been developed and options for arborvitae are available in a wide array of shapes, sizes and foliage colors. In addition to the plant's aesthetic value, arborvitae is also loved by wildlife including deer, rabbits and squirrels so precautions should be taken to protect prized plants.



EVERGREENS THAT AREN'T EVER GREEN??

The above-mentioned species are evergreens meaning they retain their foliage all year, and they are classified as conifers or cone-bearing. However, there are a few conifers in our landscapes that do not retain their foliage in the winter, these are deciduous conifers. This is an important distinction because it can be quite alarming to see a conifer drop all of its needles in late autumn if it was assumed to be an evergreen.

BALDCYPRESS

Baldcypress (*Taxodium distichum*) is a stunning deciduous conifer that is native to swamp areas of eastern United States. A stately tree with a straight trunk of reddish brown bark that exhibits an elegant buttress at the base. Soft, light green leaves turn bronze in autumn before shedding for the winter. An adaptive trait developed in the swampland conditions is the formation of 'knees' which are roots that emerge above the soil or water surface that help anchor the tree and are thought to assist with transpiration in the anerobic conditions of a swamp.

The native swamplands of the Baldcypress have tested this tree, resulting in a hardy, adaptable tree suitable for a wide range of site conditions from swampy to dry sites, from compacted to those with rich loam soils. It has even been observed to withstand the harsh conditions of paved parking lots and boulevards in Northern Illinois.

AMERICAN LARCH

American Larch or Tamarack (*Larix laricina*) is native to much of Canada and north central United States. One of the most adaptable conifer species, American Larch can grow in high timberline areas of shallow soil and be found in low lying areas with consistent moisture. Tolerant of a wide range of rainfall and amounts of daylight, the Achilles heel of American Larch is high temperatures. A beautiful tree for the landscape with petite rose colored cones in the spring, soft, fine textured green needles in the summer, and autumn turns the leaves golden yellow before they fall to the ground. *Larix laricina* is listed as Endangered Flora of Illinois by the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board and should never be collected from the wild.

OUTSIDER ACTION

- Take a trip to a local arboretum, conifers will take center stage.
- Make a winter arrangement with a variety of conifer boughs

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