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Evergreens: Trees for All Seasons



Gardeners are always searching for trees that stay green in winter - that's why they love needle-bearing evergreens. Evergreens hold our attention through all seasons, not just winter – spring brings bright new growth against older, darker needles; in summer their green or bluish needles act as a backdrop for deciduous trees and shrubs; attractive cones or berries grace their branches in fall; and, of course, in winter their evergreen boughs stand out against a bright, blue winter sky.

Evergreens aren't just attractive to people, they're attractive to wildlife also – offering shelter, warmth and food for birds and small mammals, making them a great addition to wildlife gardens.

Let's take a look at the different types of needle-bearing evergreens so you can select the best one for your landscape needs.

Pines (*Pinus spp.*) are loved for the dark green, sometimes long, needles that decorate their branches.

In the wild, pines can be found growing on rocky slopes which tells us they need well-drained soil. If the soil holds too much moisture, their needles will yellow (which, unfortunately, is often interpreted as too little water). Pines need little fertilizer and over fertilizing will encourage rapid, rank growth. As they age, the bottom branches will naturally die and should be pruned off. This should be kept in mind if planting pines for privacy or a wind break.

Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*) is a stately tree at maturity, reaching 40-60' tall, with a dense, pyramidal growth and uniform crown. The needles are very dark green and can be up to 6" long. Austrian pines do well in cold-winter regions. They require regular water in well-drained soil.

Bristlecone pine (*Pinus aristata*) is an extremely slow-growing, long-lived tree that reaches 20' feet when mature. Its slow growth and shorter stature make it a perfect

specimen for rock gardens and bonsai. Bristlecones have shorter needles (1 – 1.5” long) that are dark green and distinctively flecked with white resin.

Pinon pine (*Pinus edulis*) is our well-known native pine that grows alongside our native junipers. Pinons are slower-growing to 20’ with spreading branches that reach out almost as wide as the tree is tall. They develop a rounded, flat crown with age. The needles are dark green and short (1.5” long). From pinon pine cones comes the delicious pine nut. In the southwest, pinons are suffering from the long drought so additional water during dry spells is recommended.

Ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) is another native, growing in large stands at higher elevations. This is a majestic tree, reaching 50 – 100’ tall when fully grown. It grows a straight trunk with orange-brown bark that is revealed as the lower branches die off. The needles are a lighter green and can extend up to 11” long. Ponderosas prefer a cooler climate and don’t always adapt well to the heat and dry winds of lower elevation.



Spruce (*Picea spp.*) are popular evergreens, grown for their pyramidal shape and dense growth while young. Spruce aren’t picky about the soil they are grown in but they do prefer cool summers so they thrive best at higher elevation.

Colorado spruce is the most widely-grown landscape spruce and is particularly admired in its blue-phase. The short, spiky needles of Colorado spruce range from green to blue green to steely blue. Mature height is 30 – 60’ tall with a spread of 10 – 20’. Due to its popularity, there are many varieties of Colorado spruce available. ‘Fat Albert’ is a great choice for smaller yards, growing to only 15’ tall by 15’ wide. ‘Hoopsi’ is considered one of the best blue-forms with silvery-blue needles and a very pyramidal form.

Junipers (*Juniperus spp.*) are the evergreen choice for warm summer regions. They grow naturally on rocky slopes in well-drained soil and can tolerate full sun to light shade. Junipers can take little to regular water but their roots must not stay wet between waterings. They generally have short, prickly, gray-green needles and instead of cones produce blue berries (which are loved by our native quail). There is such an astounding variety of junipers available, from low-growing groundcovers to mid-size shrubs to pyramidal trees, that it’s almost impossible not to find a place for a juniper in any landscape.

Look around your yard – there is sure to be a space for a specimen evergreen, a need for a privacy screen, or a corner for wildlife habitat. And there’s sure to be an evergreen to fill that need!

