

Tree Identification Cards

Background

Winter is a time of drought for trees. Reduced precipitation, coupled with freezing temperatures means less water is available for trees to use. Photosynthesis requires water, so deciduous trees drop their leaves in autumn, and rest from making sugar. Evergreen trees have a waxy coating on their leaves to retain water in their leaves, so they can make sugar year 'round. Winter is a great time to explore evergreen trees, since they are so easy to find in the woods. This activity focuses on conifers, or cone-bearing trees. The medicinal and edible use of plants provided in this article is intended for entertainment value only and should not be used for self-treatment of illness. Many plants contain toxic compounds, and most medicines are toxic in large quantities.

Objective

Children learn some of the common evergreen trees in their area, and what to look at when trying to tell them apart.

Method

Kids find a tree from the cards provided, and then show it to their family or friends, telling them about the tree.

Materials

Copy of the tree cards, wooded area that includes some evergreens, pen or pencil, journal (optional).

What to do

1. If time allows, scout out the backyard, neighboring woods, wildlife management area or park where you want to take the youngsters. Identify some or all of the trees on the cards. This way, when you want to do the activity, you'll be able to quickly find the trees.
2. Hand out the cards to the children. Depending on their ages and abilities, and the number of kids, you can hand each child or each group a single card.
3. Tell the kids you are going on a tree hike. Their assignment is to find the tree on the card. Ask them to let you know when they find their tree.
4. Walk along at a leisurely pace, so the children have time to find their tree.
5. As each child or group finds their tree, check to make sure they have correctly identified it, then ask them to read the card aloud for the others, helping if necessary.
6. Take some time to look for signs of wildlife in, on, or near each tree. Note these in a journal, if you want. Later, you can compare and contrast which animals were noted with each tree.

More info

For more information on tree identification, including fact sheets and more images, go online to: <http://plants.usda.gov/index.html>.

Information compiled by Karen McClure

Eastern White Pine



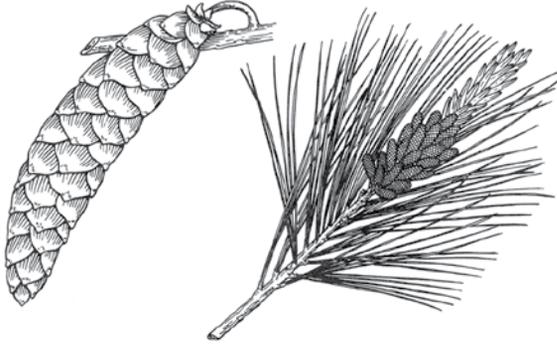
Height: Up to 100 feet

Diameter: Up to four feet

Needles: Two to five inches long, five in a bundle.

Bark: Thick, gray, smooth to rough with deep cracks and scaly ridges.

Cone: Four to eight inches long, skinny, with long stalks.



White pines grow in dry, sandy areas. They are the largest conifer in the Northeastern United States. White pine is used for lumber and paper. Pines can be used to make candy, flour, a cooked vegetable, and tea. Long ago, pitch was used on boils, arthritis, broken bones, cuts and bruises. Teas made from bark and pine needles have been used to treat coughs, colds, headaches, and backaches.

Illustrations courtesy of NJ DEP – Division of Parks and Forestry/
NJ Forest Service – Forest Resource Education Center.

Eastern Red Cedar



The word cedar is used for several unrelated trees.

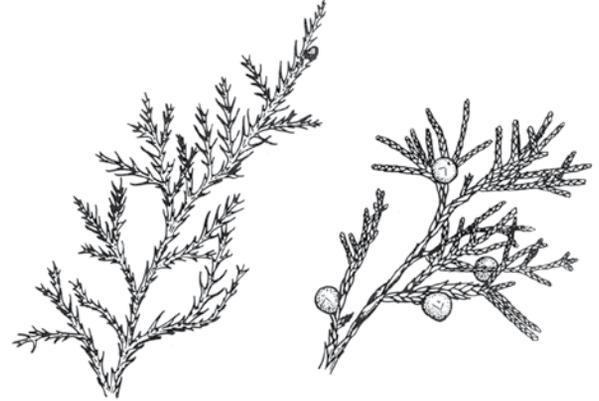
Height: Up to 75 feet

Diameter: Up to two feet

Needles: ¼ to ½ inch long, opposite in arrangement.

Bark: Thin, reddish brown, peeling off in long strips.

Cone: Light blue “berries,” ¼ inch in diameter.



Red cedars grow on dry hillsides. The cones are an important food for cedar waxwings. Red cedar wood is used for chests, fence posts, and carvings. Cedar oil is used in medicine and perfume. Long ago, cedar cone tea treated colds, worms and arthritis. Leaf smoke or steam was inhaled for colds and arthritis. Warning: red cedar is toxic.

Virginia Pine



(also known as Scrub Pine)

Height: Up to 60 feet

Diameter: Up to 1½ feet

Needles: 1½ to three inches long, two in a bundle.

Bark: Thin, brownish-gray with narrow scaly ridges, shaggy.

Cone: 1½ to 2¾ inches long, egg-shaped, clusters of three to four, short stalks.



Virginia pine grows in dry areas. It is used for lumber and paper. Pines can be used to make candy, flour, a cooked vegetable and tea.

Shortleaf Pine



(also known as Yellow Pine)

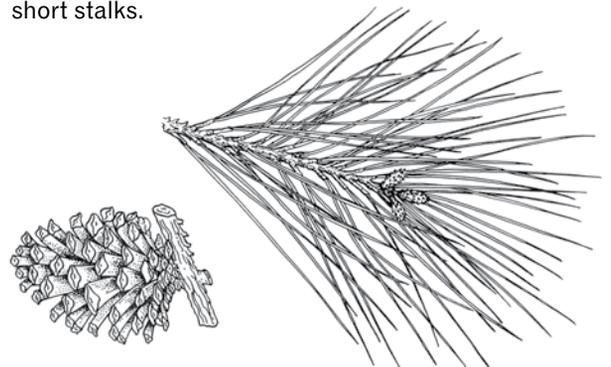
Height: Up to 100 feet

Diameter: Up to three feet

Needles: Three to four inches long, two, sometimes three in a bundle.

Bark: Reddish brown with large scaly plates.

Cone: 1½ to 2½ inches long, cone or egg-shaped, with short stalks.



Shortleaf pines grow anywhere from dry ridges to river bottoms. Shortleaf pine is used for lumber and paper. Pines can be used to make candy, flour, a cooked vegetable, and tea. Long ago, Native Americans made a bark tea to make people vomit. Tea made from pine buds was used to treat worms. Pitch (sap) tea treated kidney problems, tuberculosis and constipation.

Eastern Red Cedar

Juniperus virginiana



Karan A. Rawlins, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org

Eastern White Pine

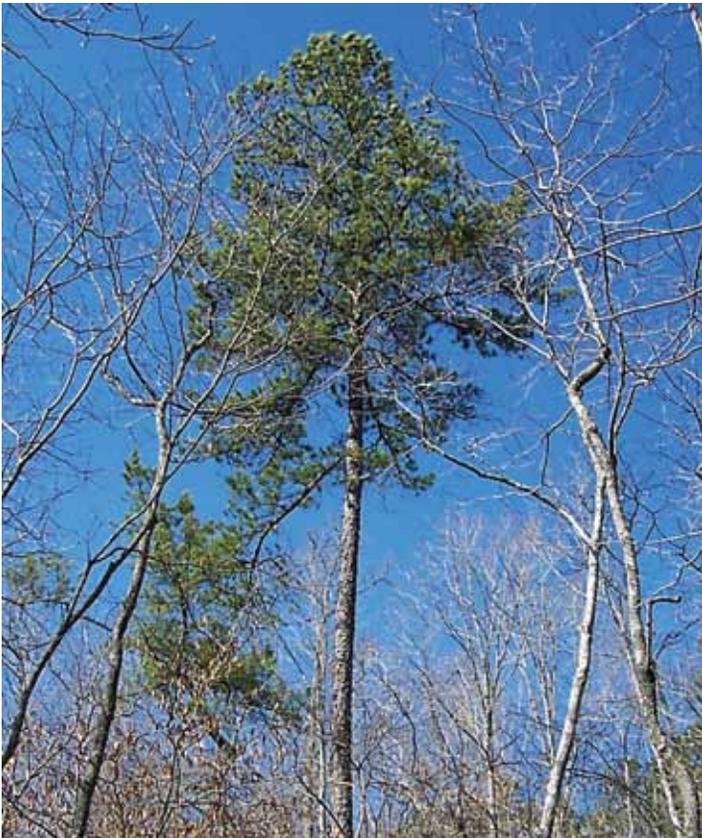
Pinus strobus



Joseph O'Brien, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

Shortleaf Pine

Pinus echinata



David Stephens, Bugwood.org

Virginia Pine

Pinus virginiana



David Stephens, Bugwood.org