



U.P. TREE IDENTIFICATION KEY from Michigan State University Extension

CONIFEROUS TREE KEY

Identifying conifers, or needle-bearing trees, is the easiest and a good choice to learn how to use identification keys. Some tree parts change appearance over the course of the year or the lifetime of a tree. Working these keys takes practice.

Be careful to READ THE DESCRIPTIONS CLOSELY and CAREFULLY!

Carefully compare the descriptions with your sample and your memory of what the tree and habitat looked like. Remember that words such as "often" and "usually" do NOT mean "always". It is best to use a mature tree, or one that is not a seedling or sapling. Deciding if a small tree is just a shrub or if it is a young tree can be difficult. The appearance of a tree sometimes changes quite a bit as a tree ages (kind of like people). If you click on underlined, [blue words](#), you will link to the glossary for a definition of that word. Underlined [blue and CAPITALIZED words](#) are names of trees that will link you to another page with several similar species.

If you're not sure how to use a tree identification key like this, [click here](#). (link to home page).

1. Needles in [bundles](#)/groups. (2)
1. Needles single or flattened & [scaly](#). (6)
 2. Needles in clusters. [Tamarack](#)
 2. Needles 2-5 per bundle. (3)
3. Five needles per bundle. [White Pine](#)
3. Needles in pairs. (4)
 4. Needles 3-4 inches long. [Red or Norway Pine](#)
 4. Needles under 2 inches. (5)
5. Bark dark gray. [Jack Pine](#)
5. Bark orange-brown. [Scots Pine](#)
 6. Needles square, round, or scaly. (7)
 6. Needles flat. (9)
7. Needles scaly, flattened. [Northern White Cedar](#)

- 7. Needles square or round. (8)
 - 8. Needles 1/3-3/4 inch long, twigs hairless. [White Spruce](#)
 - 8. Needles 1/4-3/4, new twigs with hair. [Black Spruce](#)
- 9. Shrub. [Canada Yew](#)
- 9. Tree. (10)
 - 10. Needles 1/2 inch long with short stem. [Eastern Hemlock](#)
 - 10. Needles 3/4 -1 1/4 inches long, no stem. [Balsam Fir](#)

Some [alien](#) conifer species not included in this key: [Austrian pine](#), [Colorado blue spruce](#), [Norway spruce](#), [Douglas-fir](#), [European larch](#), [eastern red-cedar](#), [juniper](#), [white fir](#), and [Fraser fir](#). However, descriptions or comments can be found for those with blue links.

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