

Do you know what species of evergreen your Christmas tree is?

If you cut a live Christmas tree from the Uinta Mountains, the following information will help you determine which coniferous species your tree belongs to.

A **coniferous tree** is a 'cone bearing tree'. Coniferous trees do not produce flowers or fruit but produce 'naked' seeds inside of cones.

Conifers are referred to as 'evergreen' because their needle-like or scale-like leaves are not shed individually from the tree each year.



When most people see an evergreen tree, chances are they will call it a 'pine' tree. But not all evergreen species are pine trees.

In Uinta County and the adjacent Uinta Mountains native evergreens include pine, fir, spruce, and juniper species.



Pine, fir, and spruce trees are the evergreen species most often cut as Christmas trees in our area.

To determine the species, look at the needles and remember these words:

- *Pine needles come in packets*
- *Fir needles are flat & friendly*
- *Spruce needles are square & sharp*



The needles of **pine trees** are fascicled into packets or bundles. The number of needles in each bundle can vary from species, but Lodgepole pines in our area have 2 needles per bundle. These needles are 3 to 9 cm long and are often twisted.

Lodgepole pine trees have stiff ovoid cones from 3 to 6 cm long that remain on the tree for several years and often look lopsided.

'Flat, Friendly Fir'

(Fir needles are flat in cross section & friendly to the touch.)

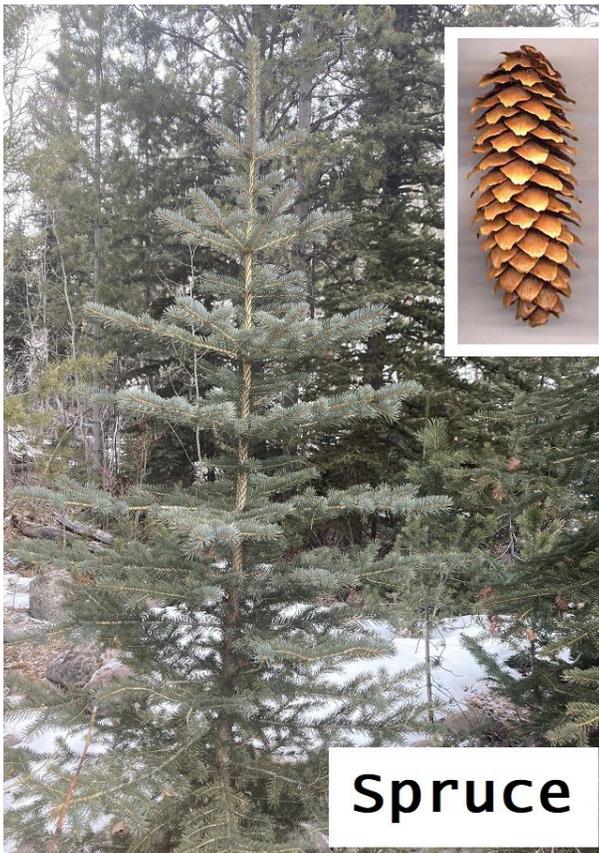


Fir trees have needles with rounded tips which make them friendly to touch. They are also flat in cross section. The needles arise solitary from the stem (not in bundles) and grow from 2 to 3 cm long. The most common fir tree in our area is the Subalpine fir.

Subalpine fir cones are 6 to 10 cm long, grow upward, and are produced toward the top of the tree. Because fir cones fall apart after maturation, you will rarely find a tree with cones at Christmas time, if you do, they will likely fall apart before you get home.



Fir



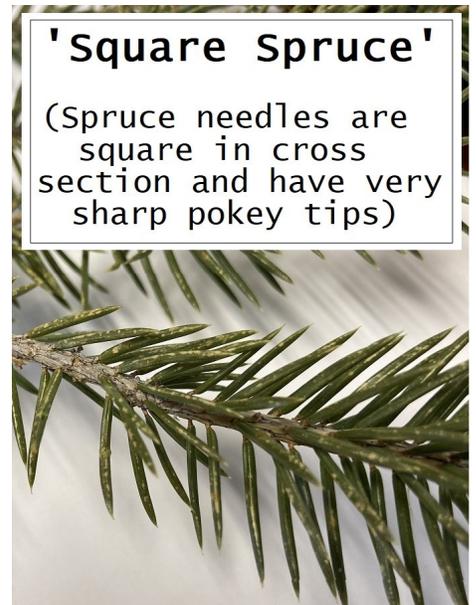
Spruce

The needles of **spruce trees** are square in cross section. You can feel this as you roll a needle between your fingertips. Spruce needles are not friendly, they have sharp tips. Needles of the most common spruce native to our area, Engelmann's spruce, grow from 1 to 3 cm long.

The cones of Engelmann's spruce are light brown in color, 4 to 7 cm long and remain on the tree for up to a year after maturing.

'Square Spruce'

(Spruce needles are square in cross section and have very sharp pokey tips)



Other Interesting Christmas tree facts

Mistletoe grows in the Uinta Mountains:

Lodgepole pine dwarf mistletoe is a locally native species of dwarf mistletoe. Mistletoes are obligate parasitic plants, anchoring themselves into their host to extract water and nutrients. In the Uinta Mountains, this species can grow on the stems and branches of Lodgepole pine, a common Christmas tree species. The leaves of this species of mistletoe are much reduced and scale-like, matching the yellowing to olive green color of the stems. The small, clustered stems end in petal-less flowers.

Berries produced by this mistletoe mature during the second summer. Each berry contains only one seed that is explosively expelled from the fruit at maturity. Seeds can be discharged up to 50 ft at 60 mph for dispersal to nearby trees! Most of the parasite, however, is beneath the bark causing weaknesses in the host tree. A fair amount of timber is lost annually because of the host's increased susceptibility to infections, drought stress, fire and pine beetle attack.



The 2010 US Capitol Christmas tree was a 67 foot Engelmann spruce from the Bridger-Teton National Forest in Wyoming.



Douglas fir is another coniferous species that grows in in SW Wyoming and the Uinta Mountains. This species is not considered a 'true fir'. Douglas fir needles are flat in cross section but differ from those of the Subalpine fir because the tips that tend to be more blunt than rounded. The needles also narrow slightly before the joining to the twig. Douglas firs are most easily recognized by their cones which have snake-tongue like bracts that stick out between the scales.



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