

## Evergreen Trees- How to identify Pines, Spruces, and Firs

This article is referenced using the "Is It Pine, Spruce, or Fir?" fact sheet by Curtis E. Young, Van Wert County

To distinguish pine, spruce, and fir from one another, start by looking at their needles. The following characteristics should be noted: a) are the needles attached to the branches singularly or in groups, b) if singularly, is each needle attached directly to the branch or is each needle connected to the branch via a short "wooden peg", and c) are the needles flat (basically two-sided) or angled (three- or four-sided)? Additional needle characteristics (e.g., needle length, sharpness, flexibility, scent, and color) are needed when separating tree species from one another within the genera (pines, spruces, and firs).

Pines have slender needles (leaves) arranged in bundles of two, three or five with a permanent or deciduous papery wrap or sheath at their bases called a fascicle. This characteristic of having needles in bundles is unique to pines and immediately separates them from the spruces and firs, which present their needles on the branches singularly.

Spruces have needles attached individually to the branches via short wooden, peg-like structures called pulvini. Spruces retain their needles for four to 10 years before shedding them. When the needles are shed, the pegs remain attached to the branches making the spruce branches feel rough after the needles are gone. Spruce needles tend to be stiff and sharply pointed making them somewhat unpleasant to work around when doing yardwork, pruning or removal, or decorating. Spruce needles easily roll between one's fingers and have a distinctive square (four-sided) shape.

Firs also have needles attached individually to the branches. However, fir needles lack pegs and thus the branches are not rough after the needles are shed. The base of the fir needle is expanded into a round base giving the needle the appearance of a suction-cup tipped dart. When the needle is pulled off the branch or is naturally shed, a small, circular leaf scar is left behind. Fir needles are soft, flat (two-sided) and cannot be rolled between one's fingers. Fir needles give off a citrusy scent when crushed, which is a desirable aroma for candles.

An easy saying to remember is "firs are friendly, spruces are sharp." This helps you distinguish between the two when you go to "give them a handshake". The fir is very soft to touch, and the spruce is sharp. Pines are distinctively the only evergreen trees that have their needles arranged in a bundle where they are attached at the same point.

Common pines in Ohio include Austrian pine, eastern white pine, loblolly pine, mugo (Swiss mountain) pine, pitch pine, red pine, Scotch pine, and Virginia pine. Other pines that are sometimes found in arboreta, parks, and cemeteries include Ponderosa pine, shortleaf pine, Jack pine, Korean pine, Himalayan pine, lacedark pine, and Japanese red pine.

Common spruces in Ohio include Colorado spruce, Norway spruce, and white spruce (including dwarf Alberta spruce). Another spruce sometimes found in arboreta, parks, and cemeteries is Serbian spruce (it is also becoming a more regular choice for landscapes).

Fir trees are not nearly as common in Ohio as spruce and pine. However, they are often grown as Christmas trees. The most common firs in Ohio include balsam fir (including Canaan fir), Fraser fir, and white fir.

## Upcoming Dates & Reminders

Women In Ag Webinars- December 13th from 10:30-11:30 via Zoom. Registration is free. Topic is on Marketing for your Farm Business. Learn how to use your marketing resources to ensure you are communicating the 'right' message to attract the 'right' customers for your farm business. Register for each month's Women in Ag Webinar at <https://go.osu.edu/wiawednesdaywebinars2023>

Backyard Poultry Certification Course- This is an online program with 6 modules as a self-paced course to learn about husbandry, nutrition, biosecurity, egg production, and disease prevention in backyard poultry. The certification course is \$25. Registration can be found at <https://go.osu.edu/chicken>

### **Save the Dates!**

Pesticide Exam Dates for the winter- The examinations will take place at 10:00 am at the Ohio Valley Career & Technical Center on January 10th, February 7th, March 6<sup>th</sup>, April 10<sup>th</sup>, and May 1st.

Pesticide Recertification & Agricultural Fertilizer Recertification- February 27<sup>th</sup> 5:00-9:00pm at the Adams County Fairgrounds, Administration Building

GAP Training for Adams & Brown County Tobacco Producers- February 20<sup>th</sup> from 9:00-11:00 at the Raines Farm & Greenhouses. Registration for GAP Annual Training is now open and can be found at <https://shop.gapconnections.com/meetings/calendar>