

How to Use the Conifer Key

1. Observe the tree or specimen for the following:
 - size and shape of needle (flat, square, spiky)
 - whether the needle is attached singly or in the needles are in bunches
 - the size, shape, and posture (upright or hanging) of the female seed bearing cone or berry
 - the bark (mature trees have specific traits that may help in identification)
 - the overall size and general shape of the tree
2. Starting with number 1 on the key and using the characteristics of your chosen specimen choose either 1 (a) or 1 (b), then proceed to the number indicated.
3. Continue to make another choice between the two descriptions, and proceed again to the number indicated. By following this method you should end up at a choice which indicates a particular species.
4. When you have identified one species find the next specimen and start the process all over, beginning at number 1.
5. Continue to do this until you have identified all the trees indicated.

Vocabulary:

Bundle: refers to two or more needles that attached to a stem in the same place

Seed cones: the female cones which contain seeds and are most prominent on the tree. (Male cones are usually much smaller and contain the yellow pollen which is spread in the spring.)

Softwood : Softwood trees are usually evergreen, bear cones, and have needles or scale like leaves. They include pine, spruces, firs, and cedars. Wood hardness varies among the conifer species, and some are actually harder than some hardwoods.



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