

Native Evergreen Trees of Pennsylvania

By Karen Kinslow, Penn State Master Watershed Steward

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, an evergreen is “any plant that retains its leaves through the year and into the following growing season.” In the Northern Hemisphere, evergreen forests are typically needle-leaved and coniferous. They naturally occur in a variety of habitats, including forests, uplands, marshes, floodplains, and fields.

Homeowners, farmers, and municipalities are attracted to evergreen trees for various reasons, including their year-round cover. When the leaves fall from the last deciduous tree as winter begins, the trusty evergreen stands out in its green magnificence. Evergreen trees and shrubs provide good shade and are ideal for creating privacy or acting as hedgerows. Some evergreen trees are aromatic, some bear fruit for that pop of color on a gray landscape, and some are fast-growing or easily transplanted.

We hope that Montgomery County residents interested in planting evergreen trees will consider the native varieties listed below. Native plants are best suited for growth in this area and are most useful for local wildlife. As an added bonus, most of our evergreen trees are relatively deer tolerant. Some species require sun, and some prefer shade to survive and thrive. There is a native evergreen species to fit all soil varieties and site variations.

For evergreen shrubs and perennials to keep your gardens looking lively, [click here](#).

Pennsylvania Native Evergreen Trees

- [American Holly](#)

Ilex opaca

This tree, which can grow to 25-60 feet tall, has spiny dull green leaves, small white flowers, and bright red fruit. Holly prefers moist, well-drained soil that is acidic. Male and female plants are needed for the berries.



Photo Credit: Dumatchik, David

- [Arborvitae, Northern White Cedar](#)

Thuja occidentalis

Arborvitae is commonly used in rows as a privacy screen, since it has a narrow growth pattern, but the deer can wreak havoc on them. Arborvitae grows to be about 50 feet tall and is tolerant of many soil and moisture conditions.



- [Atlantic or Southern White Cedar](#)

Chamaecyparis thyoides

This is an aromatic tree with a spiral, classic-looking crown, blue-green needles and very small cones. It can be confused with Northern White Cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*), more commonly known as Arborvitae. It can be picky, growing best in acidic, moist soil, and the average height is 50-90 feet.

- [Balsam Fir](#)

Abies balsamea

This is the only fir native to the Northeast, and it is mostly found in the northern part of the state. It is aromatic, with dark green needles and long cylindrical cones. It grows slowly to reach 20-60 feet tall. The tree grows best in shade with moist, alkaline soil.



Photo Credit: Smith, R.W.

- [Black or Bog Spruce](#)

Picea mariana

This slow-growing tree has an irregular crown and is blue-green in color with egg-shaped cones. It ranges from 20 to 60 feet in height. It prefers acidic, moist soil like in a bog.



- [Eastern or Canadian Hemlock](#)

Tsuga canadensis

This classic-looking evergreen is the state tree of Pennsylvania and has a conical crown, with dark green, shiny needles and long elliptical cones that hang down from the ends of branches. It ranges from 60-70 feet in height. This is a very tolerant tree in terms of soil, but it prefers full sun exposure. While it is tolerant to shade, it is affected by pollution and deer, as well as other pests, often succumbing to the Asian hemlock woolly adelgid.



Photo Credit: Porse, Sten

- [Eastern Red Cedar, Red Juniper](#)

Juniperus virginiana

This dark green, small tree (10-40 feet) is aromatic and grows pale blue, berrylike fruits. It grows best in full sun, but it tolerates a wide range of soil types. The Eastern Red Cedar is easily transplanted due to its tolerance and is useful for windbreaks.



Photo Credit: Mathews, Ray

- [Eastern White Pine](#)

Pinus strobus

This is the largest conifer in the Northeast, growing to a height of about 100 feet. It grows quickly but is known for losing its limbs. It has a straight trunk, narrow and cylindrical cones, and long blue-green needles that are five in a bundle. The best soil for the Eastern White Pine is well-drained and slightly acidic.



Photo Credit: Wasowski, Sally and Andy

- [Pitch Pine](#)

Pinus rigida

The yellowish-green needles of this evergreen are bundled in threes. The yellowish brown cones stay attached, although they open at maturity. This medium-sized tree grows to a height of 50-60 feet and has a wide soil tolerance.



Photo Credit: Makin, Julie

- [Red Spruce](#)

Picea rubens

The needles of this handsome evergreen are green and shiny, and the cones are rounded. The height can range from 50-80 feet, and the preferred soil is moist and acidic.



Photo Credit: Smith, R.W.

- [Short Leaf or Yellow Pine](#)

Pinus echinata

This is a large tree with an open crown, ranging from 70 to 100 feet in height. The needles are dark blue-green and bundled. The cones remain attached at maturity, and they are long, rounded, and dull brown. This evergreen naturally occurs on ridges, so it can tolerate dry, sterile soils.



Photo Credit: Wasowski, Sally and Andy

- [Table Mountain Pine](#)

Pinus pungens

This small tree (20-40 feet) has an irregular crown, twisted dark green needles, and shiny, egg-shaped cones that form in clusters on the branches. It can be grown in dry, rocky soils.

- [Red Pine](#)

Pinus resinosa

This common tree has an irregular, rounded crown and has needles that are two in each bundle. The cones are light brown and egg-shaped. A large tree, it can grow 70 to 80 feet tall and grows best in dry, sandy soil.



- [Virginia Pine](#)

Pinus virginiana

The shiny reddish-brown cones of this 30-60 foot tree stay attached. It has short, green needles. The Virginia Pine is adapted to poor soils, but it grows best in dry, loamy soils. It is deep-rooting and slow-growing.



References

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