

Nature Notes

From Spindly to Spectacular



The three species of Pines found in the Nature Park all have needles grouped in bunches of five or fewer needles per bundle whereas the Larches have far more needles per bundle.

Lodgepole pine. The lodgepole pines have two needles per bundle. They produce two types of cone, one opening on the tree to let the winged seeds out and another resinous cone which only opens when exposed to heat typical of a forest fire. Between fires these resinous cones accumulate on the ground so after a fire (which kills the thin-barked adult trees) an extremely high density of Lodgepole pine seedlings emerges from the blackened remains. The huge numbers of beetle infested Lodgepoles in the Nature Park now were seedlings released by the last major forest fire in the Park in 1919. Lodgepole pines are valued as a source of straight-grained lumber and chips for pulp. The first nations people used them for fishing spears and dwelling poles and also ate the sweet inner bark in the spring when the sap started running. Black bears will sometimes shred the bark to get at this inner layer.

Ponderosa pine. Ponderosa pines have three very long needles per bundle and thick reddish bark smelling faintly of vanilla on hot summer days. These trees do well in the hot and dry conditions around sunflower hill. Mature trees self prune meaning they have few branches close to the ground. This along with their thick bark and great height protects mature trees from fire. Fires used to sweep through this area every 10 to 15 years, keeping young trees and brush in check so the Ponderosa pine forest would have contained very large widely spaced trees in a park like setting. The seeds are quite large and were gathered and eaten by many interior first nations peoples.

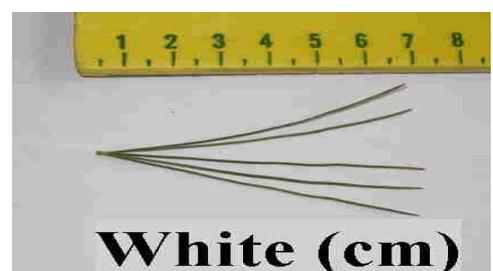
Western White Pine. Western white pines are a less common pine tree with needles in bundles of five. The wood of the white pine has a fine straight grain and is valued for mouldings, and for carving. Unfortunately the white pines suffer from a fungus infection called blister rust, which can girdle branches within 2.5 metres of the ground and thus kills young trees.



Lodgepole (cm)



Ponderosa (cm)



White (cm)

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