

Norway Spruce

Picea abies

Common name:
Norway Spruce

Pronunciation:
PI-see-a A-beez

Family:
Pinacea

Genus:
Picea

"With its long, pendulous branches cloaked with soft-looking needles, Norway spruce looks as if it is wearing a green robe."

"Many birds seek shelter in Norway spruces during harsh winter weather, including mourning doves, crows, blue jays, tufted titmice, dark-eyed juncos, ruffed grouse, northern goshawks, and barred owls. A native species of northern Europe, *P. abies* is a key forest species in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and Russia. It has been planted as an ornamental and a forest and watershed tree throughout the United States.

(excerpt from Charles Fergus, *Trees of New England, A Natural History*)

Quick ID Tips

- Tallest spruce with a distinct pyramidal shape and drooping or pendulous secondary branches.
- Needles are 3/4-1" long, stiff, bright to dark green, have blunt tips, and are arranged all around the stem.
- The narrow 6" cones hang down and have pointed and slightly toothed scales.

Details

- This coniferous evergreen tree grows to 50-80 ft. tall with a distinct pyramidal shape with drooping secondary branches, stiff when young more, graceful later. It is the largest spruce in much of the eastern United States and is long-lived, perhaps up to 300 years in its natural range.
- The needles are bright to dark green, stiff, blunt at tips, 3/4-1" long, arranged all around the stem, and are 4-sided with stomatal lines on each side. The

base of each spruce needle rests on a very small peg (fir and pine needles do not have similar pegs).

- The narrow 6" cones hang down and have pointed and slightly toothed scales. Seed and cone production begins around year 40.
- The bark is grayish brown with thin flaking surface scales.
- The predominant spruce species in West Newbury is likely the Norway Spruce, perhaps in large part to the many plantings of this tree under the aegis of the well-known Cherry Hill Nursery operated by the Thurlow family, which was in business from 1832 to the 1980's.
- The Norway Spruce is the source for making spruce beer and has a high vitamin C content. Traditionally in Austria, it was recognized for its medicinal value as a syrup or tea and, externally, as an inhalant, bath additive, and for treatment of various skin disorders.
- Wood from one form of the tree has valuable tonal properties for musical instruments and was used in Stradivarius violins.
- This spruce prefers full sun and moderately moist, sandy, acid, and well-drained soil.
- Hardy in USDA Zone 3-7. Native to northern and central Europe, this species is the typical 'Christmas Tree' in Britain. One famous Norway Spruce in Norway is known as Old Tjikko and has been carbon-dated to be 9,550 years old. This tree has been commonly cultivated over the past centuries and is locally naturalized in many areas.
- Sometimes used in bonsai



pyramidal shape



drooping secondary branches



branchlets and needles



female and male cones, spring



mature cones



trunk, bark

Sources:

- Oregon State University Landscape Plants,
<https://landscapeplants.oregonstate.edu/plants/picea-abies>
- David Sibley, *The Sibley Guide to Trees* (Knopf 2009)