



Non-native Conifers

Coniferous trees are resinous evergreens that bear their seeds in cones rather than true flowers. A conifer is also called a “gymnosperm” meaning naked seed. Examples are pine, fir, juniper, cedar, cypress, spruce, and tamarack. Several conifers are suitable for planting in the mid- to high-elevation areas of northern Arizona and fall is the best season to plant them. They can be planted as specimen trees for accent/interest or used as a privacy screen or windbreak. Remember that some of these trees are very large and may be unsuitable for small residential settings. However, many compact and pendulous cultivars are available and these are better suited to small spaces.

Austrian (Black) Pine (*Pinus nigra*) can grow to 50 ft tall and 30 ft wide with medium length (3”-6” long) needles. It is suitable for Sedona and Prescott. Lower elevations are hotter and less favorable for Austrian pines. The bark of the main trunk and branches is often gray-brown or sometimes almost black.

Eldercia Pine (*Pinus elderica*) can grow to 40 ft tall and 20 ft wide if grown in a protected area or a dense stand. It is an excellent pine for lower elevation areas. It is susceptible to Comandra Blister Rust which has killed most those planted in Sedona and Prescott.

Japanese Black Pine (*Pinus thunbergii*) has a spreading habit (20 ft tall/20 ft wide) and often takes on a “windswept” growth form. It is one of the few conifers that tolerates pruning and is suitable for planting in irrigated landscapes.

Scotch Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) can grow to 50 ft tall and 30 ft wide. This medium to slow growing tree is suitable for residential landscapes. It has relatively short needles and often has orange, flaky bark on the upper trunk and large branches. It is suitable for Sedona and Prescott. Lower elevations are hotter and less favorable for Scotch pines.

Deodar Cedar (*Cedrus deodara*) is a large (80 ft tall/40 ft wide), fast growing tree. In fact, it may be too large for many residential landscapes. Short, silvery-green needles are 1½ inches long and occur in rosettes. They are graceful, pest resistant, and drought tolerant once established. They are also distinguishable at a distance by their droopy tops which straighten as they grow.

Atlas Cedar (*Cedrus atlantica*) is a smaller, more upright version of the Deodar cedar, but can grow to 50 ft tall/30 ft wide. It is also drought tolerant and pest resistant. There are cultivars of *Cedrus* which include dwarf, pendulous, and horizontal growth habits.

Junipers are available in many cultivated varieties which can be difficult to distinguish. Juniper trees rarely grow taller than 30 feet and 30 feet wide. Like cypress, they have scale-like leaves. They tend to be very drought tolerant and come in a range of colors and growth forms. Hollywood juniper (*Juniperus chinensis* ‘Torulosa’) is a small landscape tree with an interesting, twisted growth form. Spartan juniper (*J. chinensis* ‘Spartan’) is also a suitable landscape tree and is often used to replace Leyland cypress. Eastern red cedar (*J. virginiana*) is an upright tree and was widely planted in the past, but not as popular today.

Leyland Cypress (*Cupressocyparis leylandii*) is a hybrid between Alaska yellow cedar and Monterey cypress. Leyland cypress is no longer recommended because it is very susceptible Seiridium Canker: a fungal disease that eventually kills the tree.

Blue Spruce (*Picea pungens*) can grow to 80 ft tall/30 ft wide in cooler, high elevation areas. The blue-gray needles are sharp and about one inch long. The blue color is due to a waxy coating on the leaves. Climate change seems to be having some impact on these trees in Yavapai County; several established specimens die for no apparent reason.

Several other varieties of Colorado blue spruce trees sold in Yavapai County are:

Fat Albert is an upright, broadly pyramidal, semi-dwarf slow grower to 10 to 15 ft tall/10 to 12 ft wide with blue-green needles.

Baby Blue eyes is a very dense, pyramidal, slow-growing Colorado spruce with sky-blue foliage. After 10 years of growth, a mature plant will measure 5.5 ft tall/3 ft wide

Weeping Blue Pendula is a dwarf, growing to 6 ft tall/4 ft wide in 10 years, with powder blue needles. It should be staked to emphasize its weeping habit.

Bacheri is a semi-dwarf with a broad-conical form that matures to 12 to 18 ft tall/6 to 8 ft wide over time. Needles are silver-blue.

Hoopsii grows to 30 to 50 ft tall/15 to 20 ft wide

White Spruce (*Picea glauca*) varieties commonly grown in Yavapai County are Black Hills Spruce and Dwarf Alberta Spruce.

Norway Spruce (*Picea abies*) is also sold in several varieties in our county.

Take time to research the species and variety of tree you are interested in to be sure the mature size, preferred soil type and water requirements are compatible with your landscape. Also see if the tree is prone to specific pests or diseases. Coniferous evergreen trees can drip sticky pitch and tend to drop cones, needles, twigs, and other debris causing some people to consider them messy. Remember to irrigate conifers during dry periods as they still require water to conduct photosynthesis. Conifers are also very resinous which also makes them highly flammable and should not be planted close to your home or other flammable structures.

Additional Resources

[Pines of Arizona](#), University of Arizona Cooperative Extension

[Seiridium Canker of Leyland Cypress](#), University of Arizona Cooperative Extension

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