What kind of conifer is that?

Yvonne Barkley

Many people cannot tell the difference between conifers growing in Idaho's urban and wild landscapes and usually resort to just calling all of them pine trees.

Conifers are cone-bearing trees and, like all plants and animals, have both a scientific and common name. Common names are what most people are familiar with and one type of tree can have many common names. Scientific names have two-parts - *Genus*, which is a group of closely related organisms; and *species*, used to identify one group from another in the same *Genus*. By learning a few general characteristics, you can easily identify most native and introduced conifers to their *Genus* (indicated below in parenthesis).

Firs (*Abies spp.*) are friendly.

Needles are single, soft, and flattened; buds are rounded and sticky.

Photo courtesy of Native Plants PNW.com.

Douglas-fir (*Pseudutsuga menziesii*) is not a true fir.

Needles are soft and single; buds are pointed and *not* sticky.

Photo courtesy of Iowa State University Forestry Extension.edu.

Pines (*Pinus spp.*) are in packets.

Needles are in bundles of 1- 5 and are enclosed at the base by a sheath.

Photo by Chris Evans, University of Illinois, Bugwood.org.

Spruces (Picea spp.) are spiky.

Needles are single and sharply pointed and can be 4-angled or flattened.

Photo by Joseph OBrien, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org.

Larch (*Larix spp.*) have tufts of soft needles.

Also called tamarack, larch is a deciduous conifer.

Photo by Chris Schnepf, University of Idaho, Bugwood.org.

Cedars (*Cedrus* & *Thuja spp.*) and junipers (*Juniperus spp.*) have scales.

Sprays of scale-like leaves are mostly flattened.

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