

❖ Conifers by their cones

Conifers (Gymnosperms) are (usually) cone-bearing plants. They reproduce by seeds, but the seeds are not enclosed in an ovule, as in angiosperm plants. Gymnosperm means “naked seed”.

Look at the cones displayed at the Latches Ln. info box. Can you tell which ones belong to pines? Do you recognize any of the others?

Notice the different shapes and sizes. It is easy to recognize different genera, maybe even some species, by their cones once you spend some time comparing them.

Larches (*Larix*) lose all their leaves in the fall (are deciduous) and have small cones that are upright on the branches.

Spruces (*Picea*) have needles arranged in a spiral around the branches, and their cones are hanging down. Sizes vary by species.

Pines (*Pinus*) have needles arranged in groups of 2 or 5. Their cones hang down on the branches, too. The scales in the cones are thick and rigid.

Real cedars (*Cedrus*) has cones that are upright, but when ripe they fall apart. So only pieces of the cones can be found on the ground, not whole cones like with other conifers.

Firs (*Abies*) have needles arranged similarly to spruces, but needles have rounded tips. The leaves leave a round mark when pulled off the twig. Their cones grow erect and close to the top of the tree, and fall apart when seeds are ripe.

Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga*) has cones that are hanging down, and it falls down in one piece. The cones have long, papery “tongues” that stick out between the scales.

Arborvitae/cedar (*Thuja*), dawn redwoods, Japanese cedar, hemlock and Chinafir all have small, but very different shaped cones.

Yews (*Taxus*) are gymnosperms, too, but have seeds with a red fleshy outer layer making them look like berries, instead of cones. They are poisonous. Junipers (*Juniperus*) also have berry-like seeds.





(Cones of different conifers from the neighborhood.)

