

A Simple Key to Conifers (cone-bearing plants) of the eastern Washington Cascades & Foothills

Leaves scale or awl-like (Cypress Family) Cupressaceae		
Cones small and woody, needles scale-like; stomata "butterfly" shaped; twigs very flat; drooping leader	Western redcedar	<i>Thuja plicata</i>
Cones round and fleshy, mid to upper elevations; foliage foul-smelling when crushed.	Alaska Yellow Cedar	<i>Chamaecyparis nootkatensis</i>
Erect to sometimes decumbent; often bluish-green; needles awl-like; cones fleshy & greenish to purple w/fused scales	Rocky Mtn. Juniper	<i>Juniperus scopulorum</i>
Leaves (needles) soft, light green, deciduous, in clusters from persistent short shoots.		
Needles bright green and soft; twigs naked; bark thick on old trees, reddish; cones 1.5 in, east, to 5,500 ft	Western Larch	<i>Larix occidentalis</i>
Needles bright green and soft, 4 sided in x-section; twigs w/wooly hairs; cones 2-3 in, east, near timberline	Subalpine Larch	<i>Larix lyallii</i>
Leaves (needles) tough; evergreen;		
Needles in bunches of 2-5 (Pines)		
Needles 2 per bunch, ~2" long; cones 1.5-2" long; bark blackish and thin; mostly east	Lodgepole Pine	<i>Pinus contorta latifolia</i>
Needles mostly 3 per bunch, 5-8" long; cones 3-5" w/armed umbo; bark thick on old trees and cinnamon-red.	Ponderosa Pine	<i>Pinus ponderosa</i>
Needles 5 per bunch,		
Needles 2-4" long; slender & flexible; cones ≥ 6" long	Western White Pine	<i>Pinus monticola</i>
Needles 1.5-3" long; stout; cones ~ 3"; near timberline often on drier aspects.	Whitebark Pine	<i>Pinus albicaulis</i>
Needles single		
Needles flat, blunt and round at base, buds round and pitch-covered, cones erect (True Firs) Abies		
Needles horizontal but also spreading and covering the upper twig, no stomatal bands above, ~1" long; twigs partially hidden by needles from above; strongly Cascadian	Silver Fir	<i>Abies amabilis</i>
Needles strongly 2-ranked horizontally, no stomatal bands above, 1.5-2" long; twigs visible from above	Grand Fir	<i>Abies grandis</i>
Needles upswept w/1 stomatal band above, purplish cones 2-4 in, upper elevations to nearly 7,000'	Subalpine Fir	<i>Abies lasiocarpa</i>
pitch pockets in inner bark		
Needles w/2 stomatal bands above & "hockey-stick" shaped; cones 4-8 in w/large bract,	Noble Fir	<i>Abies procera</i>
in Cascades from Stevens Pass south	Douglas-fir	<i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i>
Needles pointed but not prickly; 2-4" cones pendant w/3-pronged projecting bract; buds pointed, reddish-brown		
Low to upper elevation.		
Needles flat and thin at base, cones pendant; tip of trees usually drooping		
Needles vary in length from 1/4-3/4 in, top droops, cones less than 1 in, up to 4,500 ft	Western Hemlock	<i>Tsuga heterophylla</i>
Needles ~1/2 in, surrounding twigs, sprays not flat, cones 1-2 inches, mostly upper elevation in Cascades	Mountain Hemlock	<i>Tsuga mertensiana</i>
Needles sharp and stiff with a woody supporting peg; cones pendant w/"bitten off" cone scales. (Spruces)		
Only spruce in our area, bark thin w/"cornflake" scales; cones 2-4 in with papery scales.	Engelmann Spruce	<i>Picea engelmannii</i>
Usually above the Douglas-fir zone		
Leaves needle-like, 2-ranked, flat and pointed; seeds borne singly w/a pulpy, ultimately reddish covering; (Yew Family) Taxaceae	Western Yew	<i>Taxus brevifolia</i>
Usually Shrub-like (sometimes tree-like), dioecious; primarily in Hemlock and silver fir zones.		

Key prepared by Don Schaechtle for the Seattle Mountaineers and revised by Terry Lillybridge (1/2012). Used with permission