

Tree Talk

Do You Have a Pine or a Spruce Tree?



If you have ever been to the Black Hills of South Dakota, you have seen a lot of native stands of Rocky Mountain Ponderosa pine and pockets of Black Hills white spruce trees. The Black Hills white spruce is native only to the Black Hills of South Dakota. The Ponderosa pine is native to the Black Hills and a few small areas in NW and SW



South Dakota. Native means these trees originated in these areas and were not brought in and planted by someone. Many of us throughout the state have a pine or spruce in our yard or know someone who does. We often struggle with identifying them as anything more specific than an 'evergreen'. Pine and spruce differ in that pine trees are normally longer needled and the needles are found in groups. Spruce trees have shorter needles found singly on the tree. Growth habit of spruce is normally more pyramidal and dense than that of pine.

The Ponderosa pine (upper left photo), also known as 'yellow pine,' is the most valuable timber tree in South Dakota. The oldest Ponderosa pine in South Dakota is around 700 years old. This tree is planted widely in our state as a windbreak tree, ornamental and sometimes as a Christmas tree. The needles are 5-11 inches long and can be found in groups of 2 and 3. Needles drop when they are 3 years of age. The cones are usually 3-6 inches long. This tree is sometimes confused with the commonly planted Austrian pine which is native to Europe.

The white spruce (upper right photo) found in the Black Hills has different characteristics than the general white spruce species found in Canada and other northern states and is known as the 'Black Hills Spruce'. This tree is also planted statewide in shelterbelts and in home landscapes. Single needles that are 4-sided and approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inches long persist on the tree. Cone sizes of the Black Hills spruce are approximately 1 to 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. This tree has few serious pest problems unlike the commonly planted Colorado blue spruce, which is native in the Rocky Mountains. The blue spruce is seldom recommended in South Dakota because of its problems with an assortment of serious pests and diseases.

*Aaron Kiesz
Urban Forestry Specialist
S.D. Div. of Resource Conservation and Forestry,
523 E. Capitol
Pierre, SD 57501 or
Phone at (605) 773-3594 or 1-800-228-5254 (SD Only)
Or visit our website: www.state.sd.us/doa/forestry/index.htm*