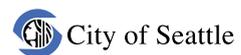




Find more information at [www.seattle.gov/trees](http://www.seattle.gov/trees)



# CONIFERS in the City

## What are Conifers?

Conifers are trees (and a few ground-hugging woody shrubs) that produce cones.

Many conifers, like pines, firs, and spruces, have needles. Others, like cypresses, junipers, and false cedars, have scale-like leaves.

Most conifers are evergreen throughout winter— but a few, like larches and dawn redwoods, are deciduous and change color in autumn before dropping their needles.

You can identify most conifers by their distinctive cones. But look closely! There are some tricksters in the family. Yews, for instance, have cones that are that are bright red and very berry-like.



# 10 Reasons to Plant, Maintain, and Cherish Conifers

## 5 WAYS TO KEEP YOUR CONIFERS HEALTHY AND HAPPY

1. Evergreen conifers reduce surface run-off — year-round.

Unlike deciduous trees which drop their leaves in winter, evergreen conifers grow and absorb groundwater throughout Seattle's winter rainy season. By sucking up rain, conifers reduce the run-off that pollutes our lakes, rivers, streams, and waterways.

2. Conifers can stabilize slopes and prevent slides — for hundreds of years.

Most conifers are long-lived and thrive in the poor-to-moderate soil and hilly terrain of Seattle. Correctly planted, conifers can anchor slopes and prevent soil erosion.

3. Natural birdfeeders, conifers sustain a variety of wildlife.



Chickadees, wood warblers, and nuthatches dine on tiny insects they find in conifer branches, bark, and cones. Finches forage for seed they find in broken cones. And berry-eaters—like bluebirds, robins, and thrushes—feast on the fruit-like seed cones of the juniper and yew.



4. A variety of conifers add structure and interest to your garden design.

Ever since 19th century explorer and plant collector David Douglas sent seed cones back to Scotland's Kew Royal Botanic Gardens, NW conifers have added elegance to formal garden planning. Varying in height, texture, and color, conifers offer yearlong interest to any landscape.

5. Properly placed, conifers provide a living privacy screen.



Annoying neighbors? Many conifers, such as our native hemlocks and cedars, have thick evergreen foliage and sweeping low branches that can block unwanted sightlines. Conifers also are effective noise barriers.

6. Conifers keep our air fresh and clean.

Not only do most conifers have a pleasant aromatic scent, they also cleanse the air by trapping dust and other pollutants in their dense foliage. And, like all trees and woody shrubs, they store carbon and give off oxygen.

7. Cut energy costs and reduce your carbon footprint—with conifers.

A tall conifer can give you shade in the summer and a wind break in the winter. This means a strategically planted tree can keep you comfortable and save you money!



8. In our maritime climate, conifers thrive and need little maintenance.

Our native conifers (and many species from Asia) love rain and coastal fog. Although you must water recently planted trees in the dry summer months, after a few years most trees won't need summertime watering. Choose carefully: if you plan for your conifer's eventual size and shape, almost no pruning will be needed.

9. Without conifers, Lewis & Clark would have been up a creek.

Led by native guides, early explorers travelled in traditional ways. It is well documented that Lewis and Clark journeyed westward by dugout canoe. Without western redcedar, the wood prized by NW Indians for their boats and totem poles, Lewis & Clark may never have reached the Pacific Ocean.

10. Not only are conifers long-lived, they're older than the dinosaurs!

The oldest known conifers appeared on earth nearly 300 million years ago. Some conifers like dawn redwoods and monkey-puzzle trees are "living fossils," virtually unchanged since the Mesozoic Era.



1. **Never top your trees.** Topping deprives a tree of its lead branches and invites decay into the trunk. Most trees never recover from topping and slowly die.
2. **Remove ivy and other vines from trunks.** Untended, ivy will grow up into the canopy, block life-giving sunlight, and choke the tree. Ivy also harbors unwanted pests like rats and invites decay into the tree trunk.
3. **Consider the eventual height and girth of the conifer.** Make sure you have appropriate space to plant a large conifer. Trees under power lines must stay below 20' at maturity (eliminating all but the shrubbier conifers). All trees should be planted 5' from sewer and water lines.
4. **Choose a variety that will do well.** Conifers prefer sun. But do your research. There are some conifers, like hemlocks, that tolerate shade.
5. **Prune carefully, if at all.** Most conifers require little pruning. A few conifers, like cypresses and junipers can be shaped into hedges, but beware! If you cut back beyond the green growth, those bare spots will take years to recover.



Photo by Ramie Pierce

Topping makes your tree less safe and more expensive to maintain. Trees react to topping by sending out shoots. Often surpassing the original height of the tree, these shoots are weakly attached to the main trunk and can become unsafe.