

State
Tree of

COLORADO

Blue Spruce

Picea pungens

The "Colorado" blue spruce is Colorado's official state tree. Charles Christopher Parry, renowned botanist and explorer of the West, discovered this tree on the flanks of Pike's Peak in 1862. The Colorado Horticultural Society, a bureau of state government, began promoting tree education in schools and sponsored a contest to decide the children's favorite tree in 1892. Denver high school teacher George L. Cannon Jr. developed criteria for a fitting choice, and blue spruce was declared the winner. Finally, on March 7, 1939, the Colorado General Assembly approved House Joint Resolution No. 7 declaring blue spruce Colorado's official state tree.

This tree is known for its stately, majestic, symmetrical form and its beautiful silver-blue color. In Colorado, it grows in small, scattered groves or singly among ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, alpine fir and Engelmann spruce. In the northern parts of its range it grows at the 6,000 to 9,000 feet elevation while in the southern parts of its range at 8,000 to 11,000 feet. Its color ranges from green to blue to silver, and is sometimes called the silver spruce.

The native range of blue spruce is the central and southern Rocky Mountains of the USA – in Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona.

Perhaps seen more often in front lawns than in the forest, blue spruce has a rather restrictive set of requirements and thrives best along mountain streams and rivers. The bluest and greenest individuals of blue and Engelmann spruce, respectively, exceed the color extremes of the other species. But the color overlap is such that it is not a particularly good way to tell these two trees apart. The bigger cones and more layered branching habit of blue spruce, as well as the differing bark characteristics of the two species, are better identifiers, but even with the help of these visual aids, identification can be difficult.

Grows to a height of 70 to 115 feet.



Cones ripen and release seeds in September and October (2 - 4 inches long)



Pollen cones are found throughout the tree



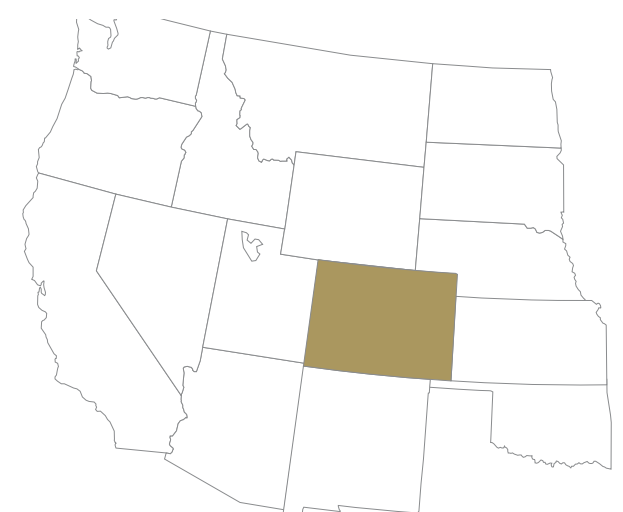
Cones emerge in May and June.



Seed cones emerge from the tips of the upper branches.

LL Ellis

THE STATE TREE OF COLORADO



Blue spruce has been little used for lumber or wood products because it is rarely abundant in nature and the wood is brittle and often full of knots. It sometimes is cut with Engelmann spruce. Because of its cold hardiness, symmetrical pyramidal form, and waxy, blue-hued foliage, blue spruce is widely planted in ornamental and general landscape settings. Numerous horticultural cultivars have been developed, based on needle color and crown form. It is used considerably for Christmas trees and blue spruce plantations have been established in the northeastern US – these are probably the source of escapees reported for several states far from its native range (Maine, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland). Blue spruce is the state tree of Colorado and of Utah.



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