

# TREE AND PLANT IDENTIFICATION

The most basic skill that a forester must possess is the ability to recognize the trees and plants in an area. After a little practice, tree and plant identification becomes second nature: A quick glimpse of a tree's bark or a plant's leaf is often all that is needed to correctly identify the specimen.

The best way for a novice to learn the native tree and plant species is to spend some time with a forester or other knowledgeable person. Tree and plant identification is a skill that is difficult to learn out of a book.

If no one is available to teach you how to recognize trees and plants, then perhaps you could hike a nature trail that has plant species identified with labels. Many state parks and recreation areas have excellent nature trails.

**NOTE:** It is important to use the most widely accepted name for a specimen. There is often more than one name used locally for a single type of tree or shrub. For example, in some areas Lodgepole pine may be referred to as jack pine, black pine or red pine. Ponderosa pine is sometimes called bull pine or yellow pine. Douglas-fir may be called red fir and grand fir may be called white fir. With multiple names being used in different areas, it is important to know the common names most accepted by professional foresters **and** the scientific names used by foresters and botanists throughout the world. Incidentally, scientific names are sometimes revised as better knowledge about a plant's genetics becomes available.

The trees and shrubs you must be able to identify for the Forestry Contest are:

## CONIFERS

Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*)  
Western larch (*Larix occidentalis*)  
Western white pine (*Pinus monticola*)  
Ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*)  
Lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*)  
Western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*)  
Grand fir (*Abies grandis*)  
Engelmann spruce (*Picea engelmannii*)  
Subalpine fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*)  
Western Redcedar (*Thuja plicata*)

## DECIDUOUS

Paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*)  
Quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*)  
Black cottonwood (*Populus trichocarpa* \*\*\*)  
Red alder (*Alnus rubra*)

## SHRUBS

Mountain maple (*Acer glabrum*)  
Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*)  
Ocean spray (*Holodiscus discolor*)  
Ninebark (*Physocarpus malvaceus*)  
Oregon grape (*Berberis\* repens*)  
Pachistima\*\* (*Pachistima\*\* myrsinites*)  
Kinnickinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*)  
Twinflower (*Linnaea borealis*)  
Buffaloberry (*Shepherdia canadensis*)  
Wild rose (*Rosa gymnocarpa*)  
Blue huckleberry (*Vaccinium globulare*)  
Syringa (*Philadelphus lewisii*)

\*The species name for Oregon grape was recently changed to *Mahonia repens*

\*\*The genus name *Pachistima* was recently changed to *Paxistima*.

\*\*\**Populus trichocarpa* is changing to *Populus balsamifera* var. *trichocarpa*  
The older names will be used at the Forestry Contest until a new reference book is available

**Reference:** Patterson, P.A., Neiman, K. E., & Tonn, J. R. (1985). *Field guide to forest plants of northern Idaho*. Ogden, UT: USDA Forest Service, Intermountain Research Station.

## TREE PLANTING

It is important to be able to tell if a tree seedling has been planted correctly or not. The picture below shows a correctly planted tree seedling. The next picture shows a variety of incorrectly planted tree seedlings.

The correctly planted tree seedling is oriented vertically in mineral soil with its roots spread outward and down. There are no large air pockets or loose soil. The soil is even with the **root collar** (the line on the stem showing the soil level when the seedling was grown in the nursery). Shade, such as a log, rock, or cedar shingle, is provided on the southwest side of the tree. Before planting, a two to three-foot area is “scalped” using a Hoedad, Pulaski or shovel to remove vegetation (grass, etc.) that would otherwise compete with the seedling for moisture and nutrients.

