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Picea omorika

[Synonyms : *Abies omorica*, *Pinus omorika*]

SERBIAN SPRUCE is an evergreen tree. Native to the Balkans it has needle-like leaves and small hanging spindle-shaped, reddish-brown cones.

It is also known as *El Serbskaya* (Russian), *Èpicea de Serbie* (French), *Omorika* (Serbian), *Omorika spruce*, *Picea di Serbia* (Italian), *Serbgran* (Swedish), *Serbische Fichte* (German), *Serbisk gran* (Danish, Swedish), *Smrek omorika* (Slovak), *Smrek omorikový* (Slovak), *Smrk omorika* (Czech), and *Smrk pančičův* (Czech).

The flowers are pollinated by wind.

The tree is protected in the wild in the Tara Mountains in the Balkans where they now number under 1000. They are believed to be subject to the threat of genetic pollution from commercially cultivated Norway spruce (*Picea abies*) and Turkish beech (*Fagus orientalis*).

Omorika is a local Austrian name.

The tree (which tolerates air pollution) is cultivated widely as an ornamental. This is yet another species that has been treasured in the past as a Christmas tree.

It was introduced to North America in about 1880 and introduced to England (the Royal Botanic Garden at Kew) in 1889.

According to some authorities Serbian spruce has offered a source of local food. Inner bark has not only provided emergency rations but when dried and powdered has been added to bread mixtures or used as soup thickening. Raw or cooked young round male catkins have been added to food as flavouring and the roasted centres of young cones have yielded a sweet syrup. Young shoots have also been prepared as a refreshing tea.

The wood has been pulped for paper.