

Picea pungens

[Synonyms : *Picea parryana*, *Picea pungens* f. *argentea*, *Picea pungens* var. *glauca*]

BLUE SPRUCE is an evergreen tree. Native to the central Rocky Mountains (United States) it has needle-like leaves and inconspicuous reddish-yellow and greenish catkins.

It is also known as *Blågran* (Swedish), *Blaue Stech-Fichte* (German), *Blau-Fichte* (German), *Blauwe Spar* (German), Colorado blue spruce, Colorado spruce, *Edeltanne* (German), *Épicéa bleu* (French), *Epicéa du Colorado* (French), Green spruce, *Okakuusi* (Finnish), Silver spruce, *Smrek pichlavý* (Slovak), *Smrk pichlavý* (Czech), *Smrk stříbrný* (Czech), *Stech-Fichte* (German), and *Stickgran* (Swedish).

The bruised leaves emit a resinous aromatic fragrance. The flowers are pollinated by the wind. *Pungens* means ‘sharp-pointed, spiny or piercing’.

The North American Navajo Indian tribe used the branches during some of their rituals associated with Sun ceremonies. They also included the bark or roots in dye mixtures – and for several local North American Indian tribes young roots have provided fibre for twine and cord strong enough for the lacing on their canoes.

According to some authorities blue 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 and reddish-yellow male catkins have been added as food flavouring and the roasted centres of young cones have yielded a sweet syrup. The young shoots have been prepared as a refreshing tea and the roots offered an ingredient for making spruce beer.

It is often cultivated as an ornamental plant in American and European parks and gardens or as a screen or windbreak. In the United States it is also a popular Christmas tree and plantations of it have been established for this reason.

This tree is believed to have been discovered by a Dr. Parry in either 1861 or 1862. There seems to be some uncertainty as to when and how it was introduced to Britain but some authorities suggest it arrived there in the mid-1860s and others ponder the possibility seeds of this tree were sent by the Czech plant collector, Benedict Roezl (1824-1885). He sent specimens to England and Germany from Central America and the western North American coast and numbers among those collectors who may have divested native habitat of thousands of plants. (Authorities note for example that from one batch of 27,000 plants he sent to England only two survived.) Certainly by 1875 blue spruce was available there commercially. Apparently in Germany, apart from ornamental examples, blue spruce can be found in limited cultivation as a forest tree.

Blue spruce is the State tree for both Colorado and Utah in the United States. It was adopted by Utah in 1933 and Colorado in 1939.

The soft and lightweight wood has been used for general construction, veneering, flooring and paper pulp, as well as for making musical sounding boards. It has also been burnt as fuel. Medicinally, as with those of oriental spruce (*Picea orientalis*) herablists have recommended the addition of the needles to bathwater for their therapeutic qualities.