

Pinus rigida

PITCH PINE is an evergreen tree. Native from south-eastern Canada to north-eastern United States it has needle-like leaves and small, shiny pale yellowish-brown cones.

It is also known as *Begfyr* (Danish), *Borovica tuhá* (Slovak), *Borovice tuhá* (Czech), Black Norway pine, Black pine, Bull pine, Hard pine, Jack pine, Longleaf pine, Mountain pine, Northern pitch pine, Norway black pine, *Pech-Kiefer* (German), Pennsylvania yellow pine, Pond pine, Red pine, Ridge pine, Rigid pine, Sap pine, Scrub pine, Shortleaf pine, Southern pine, Southern yellow pine, *Steife Kiefer* (German), Torch pine, and Yellow pine.

The flowers are pollinated by the wind.

Warning – continued contact with the fresh wood can cause dermatitis and allergic breathing problems.

Rigida is derived from Latin *rigeo* (inflexible, unbending, stiff, rigid) meaning ‘rigid or stiff’ with reference to the leaves.

Apart from general construction and carving the wood was used by North American Cherokee Indians for their 30-40 ft. long canoes.

Iroquois Indians relied on the smoke from burning leaves to kill fleas.

Both the Shinnecock and Iroquois Indian tribes used it to treat various skin disorders, and the Iroquois also took it both as a laxative and to ease rheumatism and they applied it to burns too.

The pine knots (naturally full of pitch) used to be attached to poles by the early European settlers and lit as torches. In the past also pitch pine was one of the major sources of turpentine, tar and lampblack.

As with so many of its close relatives pitch pine has served as a Christmas tree.

The moderately strong, reddish-brown wood has been used widely for general construction, for making bridges and docks and for the manufacture of plywood. It has also been used for flooring, and interior finishing, has been made into crates and boxes and, usually after treatment with preservatives, has also been chosen for piling, mine supports, railway sleepers and poles and scaffolding. Pitch pine has been used for charcoal and burnt as fuel too.

Deer, rabbits and mice are all said to enjoy new growth (the smaller the animal the younger the growth). Many birds and rodents enjoy the tiny, mottled, dark brown seeds including quail and various types of mice – and the trees’ relationship with the red squirrels if records are to be believed is fascinating. It seems that the red squirrels rely on late-developing cones for food and by pressing them they can decide whether they contain many seeds which would make the effort of opening them worthwhile. Observations suggest that as a result in areas with high red squirrel concentrations the trees have evolved to produce fewer seeds in the cones to deter these squirrels’ ministrations and protect the odds on their own regeneration.