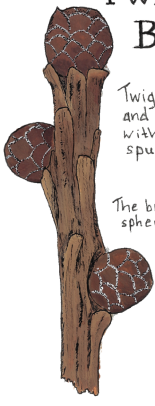
Tamarack

Larix laricina

Twig & Bud



Twig is smooth and slender with numerous spur branches.

The buds are small, spherical, and have loose scales

Leaf

needle-like leaves arranged in tufts (~10-30 per tuft); flattened dorsal surface, keeled bottom to form a triangular leaf cross-section

deciduous conifer

Habitat

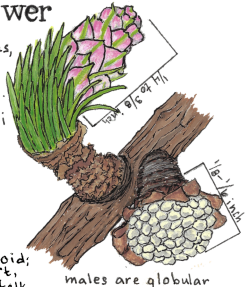
often found in swamps and marshes but can be found in upland forests

Bark

rough, thin, scaly patches; grayish-brown to reddish-brown

Flower

monoecious, cone-like structures called strobili



females emerge within a cluster of leaves; erect, ovoid; on a short, curved stalk

males are globular to oblong w/ pollen sacs & a loose collar of papery scales.

Fruit

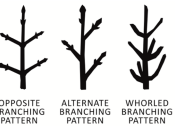
Cones are globose to ovoid in shape; scales rounded, stiff, and curved inward.

TREE OF THE MONTH

Tamarack • *Larix laricina*

ALSO KNOWN AS: AMERICAN LARCH, EASTERN LARCH, HACKMATACK

Tamarack (*Larix laricina*) is a deciduous, coniferous tree that typically reaches 50 to 75 feet in height. It displays a whorled branching pattern. The branches originating from the trunk are somewhat ascending above, widely spreading in the middle, and slightly drooping below. This species self-prunes, meaning the tree sheds any branches that become a drain or burden on its resources. One-half to two-thirds of the tamarack's trunk will be clear of branches by the time it reaches 25 to 30 years of age.



Tamarack is most commonly found on cold, poorly drained land such as swamps and forested bogs. It's also common along the edges of rivers, streams, lakes, etc., and tamarack can occasionally be found on upland sites. It can tolerate a wide variety of soils but grows best on well-drained, loamy soils; despite that, it most commonly grows on wet to moist organic soils and is especially common on nutrient-poor, acidic peatlands. Across its range, black spruce is tamarack's most common associate. In New England, common associates are northern white-cedar, balsam fir, eastern white pine, red pine, quaking aspen, black ash, white spruce, and red maple.

The needle-like leaves of the tamarack are soft, straight, and somewhat flattened (and can't be rolled between the fingers like a pine needle). They're densely clustered with ~10 to 30 needles on short ***spurs*** (~3 mm long); however, the needle-like leaves occur singularly near the ends of the twigs. They turn golden yellow in the fall and drop off, leaving the tamarack bare throughout winter until they regrow them in the spring.

On young tamaracks, the bark is gray and smooth. Mature trees stay gray but develop rough, scaly patches; these patches are thin and often break away, leaving patches of reddish inner bark. Twigs of tamarack are slender, smooth, and range from a light grayish- to orange-brown. The winter buds are round, 1/16" long, and dark red.

Tamarack trees are ***monoecious gymnosperms*** that have both male and female reproductive structures on the same tree. Male and female "flowers" are cone-like structures called ***strobili.*** They bloom from April to May—around the same time the needles begin to emerge—from the tips of short, spur-like ***lateral shoots***. Male strobili are ***globular*** to ***oblong*** in shape, and have creamy white pollen sacs that are encircled with brown, papery scales at their base. Female strobili are ***ovoid*** in shape, and emerge erect with a cluster of needles on short, curved stalks. They initially are bright pink and gradually turn maroon until they receive the male's pollen. Then, they close up as they mature into the tamarack's fruit—a cone with round, stiff scales that curve inward, and are ovoid to globose in shape.

The genus name, *Larix*, comes from the Latin word *lárix*, meaning "larch." Tamarack's species epithet, *laricina*, refers to "laricinus" and is derived from *larix* and *inus*, which essentially means "larch-like." The word "tamarack" is the Algonquian name for the species and means "wood used for snowshoes."

Tamarack is often confused with European larch and Japanese larch—two closely related species that are planted as horticultural trees in North America.

Native Americans of northern New England and Canada used tamarack for making toboggans and snowshoes and as stitching for birch-bark canoes.

There are about twenty deciduous conifers, but tamarack is the only one in New England.

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spurs: short, stocky, tubular shoots that attach to a plant stem and projects leaves, buds, and / or flowers / fruit
gymnosperm: a group of seed-producing vascular plants in which the ovules and seeds are not enclosed in an ovary
monoecious: having male and female flowers on the same plant
globose (or globular): globe-shaped
ovoid: egg-shaped
strobilus (or strobili): a reproductive structure that consists of sporophylls or scales arranged spirally or in an overlapping fashion along a central stem that resembles the cone of a conifer
lateral shoots: twig or branch coming from axillary (side) bud on the stem of a plant
oblong: having an elongated shape, as a rectangle or an oval