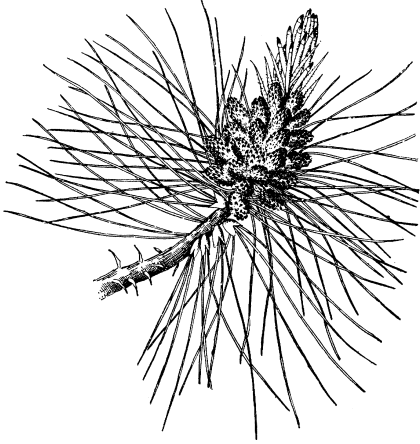


Florida Pines



Is there anything more relaxing than lying in a hammock in your own backyard, on a warm spring day listening to the gentle breeze blowing through the needles of pine trees? In fall, when all the other trees have dropped their leaves, you can still listen to that peaceful sound and let your mind carry you back to that warm spring day.

In Florida, we are lucky to have seven native pine trees. The two most common pines are the slash pine and the longleaf pine. Often they are mistaken for each other. Both have longer needles than the rest of the pine trees.

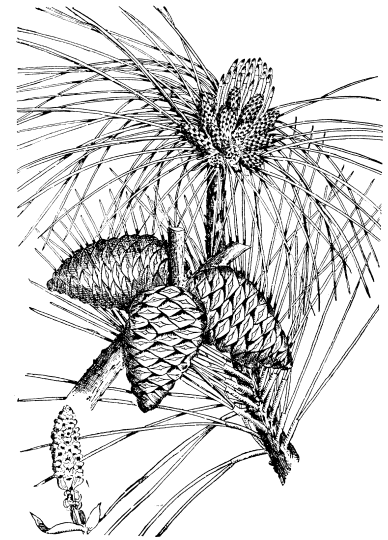
The slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*) is the most widespread. It grows natively from the western panhandle to the tip of the peninsula and the keys. They are found in open woodlands and fields in full sun and tolerate many soil types. With a fast growth rate, they can reach a height of 80 feet. The dark green needles are 8 to 12 inches and are in bundles of two and three. Its branches are at the top of a tall dark brown trunk that can be up to three feet in diameter. The purple-brown flowers appear in spring. Throughout the year, it has three to five inch long spiny-scaled cones that contain the seeds. Although pines are fire resistant, this pine is more fire dependent. The heat helps the cones open and release their seeds. The seeds are a food source for small animals and birds.

The longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) grows to a height of 80 feet in full sun. It is found in sandhill uplands and flatwoods ecosystem. It has a tall straight trunk with thick brown bark and branches at the top. During the spring, rose-purple flower clusters are borne on the branch tips. The glossy needles are nine to 18 inches long and are in bundles of three. Early settlers used to make baskets with these long needles. The large brown cones that are up to ten inches long, make good holiday decorations. This pine likes acidic soil that is well drained, dry and sandy. The first seven years of its life are spent in a rosette, or grass, stage. This is the longest lived among the pine trees. Due to their fire resistance, longleaf pines may be found with an understory of only saw palmettos or no understory at all.

The loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) is the fastest growing southern pine. It grows in full sun up to 80 feet. The small yellowish brown flowers are borne on the ends of the branches in spring. While it tolerates many soil types, it prefers slightly acidic soil. The yellowish green needles are six to ten inches long and are in bundles of three. Sharp spines line the tips of the three to six inch brown cones. This pine does not have a deep root system and is easy to transplant. A rather widespread pine, it can be found in old fields, uplands and low woodlands from northern to just below central Florida.

The sand pine (*Pinus clausa*) grows in full sun to a height of about 40 feet. In spring, it has brownish flowers on the branch tips. The two to three inch cones are clustered and contain brown, flat winged seeds that take four years to open and release. This is a short needle pine with two to three and a half inch green needles that are soft and flexible and in bundles of two. Older trees have single trunks with brown bark. The bark on younger trees is gray to reddish and is smooth. The sand pine closely resembles the spruce pine. Both have smooth branchlets when young and both have bark that is grayish and smooth. The sand pine is found naturally in deep coastal stands and inland dune ridges.

The spruce pine (*Pinus glabra*) grows in moist soil that is fertile and acidic. It is found in rich woodlands and mixed hardwood forests. It likes full sun and reaches a height of 80 feet, growing fast during the first five years, then the growth rate slows. Younger trees have gray bark and branches near the ground while the older trees have almost black bark and are more open with branches at the top. At the end of these branches are short yellow clusters of flowers in spring. Being one of the short needle pines, the spruce has dark green to yellow green needles that are two to three inches long and are in bundles of two. The cones are up to two inches in length and come in clusters of two or three. These small cones remain on the tree for two to three years and turn gray as they age.



The shortleaf pine (*Pinus echinata*) is found in northern Florida uplands and mixed hardwood stands. It grows in sandy, well drained soils to a height of 100 feet. The trunk is between one and a half to three feet in diameter and has rough reddish brown bark. Remaining on the tree for many years, the two inch cones make nice holiday decorations. The yellow-green needles are two to five inches and in bundles of two and three. It grows best in full sun and is drought tolerant.

The pond pine (*Pinus serotina*) occurs naturally throughout the panhandle and southern central Florida in poorly drained flatwoods and pond edges. The four to eight inch needles are in bundles of three and four. There are many short branches that occur all along the sometimes twisted and deformed looking trunk. After an injury from a fire, foliage may grow in tufts right from the trunk. The cones are 'top' shaped and remain unopened on the tree for many years.

There are several key factors in identifying pine trees: bark, cones, needle length, how many needles are bound together in a cluster, and habitat. All these factors must be taken into consideration to properly identify the pines because occasionally trees within the same species have characteristics similar to other species.

Some pines occur throughout the state. Others are limited to specific habitats. There are pine trees in nearly every Florida ecosystem. So climb back into that hammock and enjoy those pines throughout the year.

By: Cindy Conard

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