

Abies balsamea

Balsam Fir,
Eastern Fir

Native to Maine

Upland
Forests

Leaves



Keith Kanoti, Maine Forest Service



Look for flat, whorled needles that up to 3 cm long. They have 2 white “racing stripes” on the undersides. Look closely at how the needles attach to the twig. Needles attach like suction cups directly to the twig.



Vital Signs user "WonderWHY"



Plant



Look for a small to medium evergreen tree up to 20 m tall. Lower branches droop to the ground. In a dense stands, many of the lower branches are dead.

Stem



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Look for smooth grey bark on young trees that has blisters full of resin. Older bark is brown, rough, and scaly. Twigs are stiff.

Seasonal Change



US Fish & Wildlife Service



New cones are up to 8 cm long and are purplish, turning brown as they ripen. They release winged seeds in September.

Similar Species

It is easy to confuse balsam fir and hemlock. To tell them apart, look at how the needle attaches to the twig. Fir needles attach like a suction cup. Hemlock needles attach with a small stem. Fir twigs are stiff while hemlock twigs are flexible. Yew needles do not have stripes.

Fun Fact

The Balsam fir is commonly used for Christmas trees, grown commercially on tree farms. Its resin has been used as a glue and as a cold remedy. Balsam fir is one of the major food supplies for moose in the winter.

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