

Plant Parade Tamarack Trees

Fall is officially here and our thoughts have turned to brightly colored leaves and crisp, frosty mornings. We are all familiar with the oaks and maples with their reds, purples, and oranges, but let me introduce you to the bright yellow of the tamarack, *Larix laricina*.



The tamarack is the only deciduous conifer native to Michigan. This means it has cones like a pine or spruce, but sheds its leaves (needles) like an oak or maple. And, like an oak or maple, this time of year it puts on quite a show. As the days shorten, the tamarack stops producing chlorophyll. When the chlorophyll in the needles breaks down, the other pigments, yellow ones in this case, become visible. In time, the tree will drop all of its needles and go dormant for the winter.

The tamarack's needles are arranged in tufts of 10-20 on short spur branches spiraled along the main branch. The spur branches make tamaracks easily recognizable during the winter months. On young twigs the needles are spread out singly. These needles feel soft and silky when you run your hand down the branch. Tamarack cones are tiny, always less than an inch long. Male cones are smaller and located near the end of the branches so they can release their pollen. Female cones are reddish brown and may contain 10-30 seeds which develop after being fertilized by the pollen.



Although tamaracks grow naturally in bogs, they can grow successfully in moist upland habitats. You can find them growing here at CNC in the Garrett Arboretum or along the Chippewa Trail on your right just as you're leaving the pavilion near the Resource Building. Check out the tamarack trunks that were used to construct the frame of our wigwam.

Nature Notes



Tamarack trees do not tolerate shade and are often found growing in open, boggy environments.

Mature trees can range from 50-80 feet in height with a maximum trunk diameter of about 36 inches. They grow relatively quickly in optimum conditions. This allows them to be the over story and gather maximum sunlight.

The wood of the tamarack is rot resistant and durable. Although it is not commercially important, it has been used for railroad ties, posts, mine timbers, and dogsled runners. It is used to make pulp for the transparent paper called glassine used in envelope windows.

Red squirrels and birds feast on the seeds while grouse enjoy the needles and buds. Porcupines enjoy the inner bark, but white-tailed deer typically avoid this species.



Visit the Visitor Center Office for program information.

This inSTALLation is available online at www.chippewanaturecenter.org under the Naturalist Section.