

Balsam Fir

By Nhu Le

Abies balsamea is also known as **Balsam Fir**. This name means nothing to most of us right now. True? Well, you might be surprised to hear that you might be familiar with that type of tree. Every year many American families buy and decorate these trees. Do you know what tree I am talking about now? It is a Christmas tree!

Whenever Christmas time rolls around, the Balsam Firs are cut down from the forests of northern North America and shipped hundreds and thousands of miles to be sold. There are farms of these trees, as well as

There are farms of many growing in the wild. Balsam Fir needles (their leaves) are 3/4 to 1-1/2 inches long and dark green, rounded point and are full of fragrance. Do you know that these trees have kind of fruits that we can eat. They are actually like the cones you find on the ground around your house (those cones would be what are referred to as pinecones). The cones on the ground are purplish in color and are about 2 to 4 inches long. You will never find a mature cone on the ground because when it begins to mature, bits and bits of it break away, along with seeds. A mature cone, on the tree itself, will be standing upright.



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The tree itself can grow to about 50 to 60 feet high. The color of a young Balsam Fir's bark is ash-gray. That will change to red-brown as it matures. The trees contain a sticky liquid called sap. Balsam Firs leak their sap out of pockets, or blisters, and is therefore called the "blister pine." Sap is produced by the tree, from down in the roots, and serves as food for the trees.

The Balsam Fir grows best in cooler climates with well-drained soil and a lot of moisture. Most trees that are found here are usually conical with needle leaves. The conical shape helps to reduce the amount of snow that stays on the branches; the needle leaf helps keep in the water it receives, especially in the winter. The dark green color of the needles let the trees absorb as much sunlight as possible and allow it to start photosynthesis earlier.

Balsam Firs are also cut down for wood that is usually used for boxes, pulp, and light construction lumber. The boxes and the construction lumber is light in weight, which makes it easier to carry and the pulp is best used for firewood, since it burns so easily. It is low in shock resistance, decays rapidly, but has good splitting resistance.

All in all, the Balsam Fir is a very useful tree.