

# BLACK SPRUCE – *Picea mariana*

If you're looking for a Christmas tree, this species might not be first on your list. The black spruce is narrower than its white spruce cousin and looks more like an overgrown pipe-cleaner than a Christmas tree. But, looks aside, this tree has got what it takes to grow just about anywhere – from the wettest bogs to the driest slopes.

When its droopy lower branches touch the ground, they put down roots which send up bunches of new stems. One black spruce in northern Quebec sprouted thirty seven stems from one tree! This trick, called layering, allows the black spruce to reproduce in challenging habitats where other trees can't survive.



## HUMAN USES

### *Traditional*

- Spruce boughs used for tipi or tent floor
- Mouth wash from boiled cones to treat toothache and sore throat
- Rotted wood pounded in caribou hide used for baby powder and deodorant

### *Commercial*

- Too small, twisted or knotty for timber
- Long wood fibres make good paper

## WILDLIFE USES

- Snow-covered branches provide thermal cover
- Seeds a main food for red squirrels, chickadees, nuthatches, crossbills
- Snowshoe hare, mice and voles eat seedlings
- Spruce grouse eat needles
- Nest tree for ruby-crowned kinglets, palm warblers

## FIELD NOTES

- Cold, soggy, nutrient-poor sites
- More tolerant of wet, muskeg habitats than white spruce
- Seeds usually not destroyed by fire because concentrated in crown
- Postfire release of many seeds promotes rapid colonization

## FROM A DISTANCE

- Often shrubby with narrow, knobby crown
- Short, droopy branches

## UP CLOSE

### *Needles*

- Short, stiff, 4-sided needles
- Generally blunter than white spruce

### *Cones*

- Seed cones rounder, smaller than white spruce
- Fringed scales
- Pollen cones dark red in spring

### *Bark*

- Thin, dark grey
- Scales bigger, rougher than white spruce
- Fine reddish hairs on young twigs

