

TAMARACK – *Larix laricina*

Have you met the Official Tree of the Northwest Territories? It shows up best in late autumn, when its feathery needles turn golden, and it stands out as the only bright tree in a forest of dark evergreens and deciduous trees that have already lost their leaves. This is the tamarack, the only conifer that sheds its needles in winter, after they turn yellow, and stands bare when spruce and pine trees stay green. The tamarack is a tree of cool, wet places. The next time you are out exploring muskeg or sphagnum bogs, look for our Official Tree.



HUMAN USES

Traditional

- Preparations from inner bark used to treat deep cuts, open sores, burns, boils, frostbite, itching, bleeding, earaches, inflamed eyes
- Tea from needles, bark, and/or roots used to treat sore muscles, arthritis, diabetes, upset stomach, general health (high vitamin C)
- Preparations from needles used for aches, colds, difficulty breathing
- Wood used for canoe paddles, drum frames, toboggans, snowshoes
- Rotted wood and bark burned to smoke fish and hides
- Roots used for stitching, baskets

Commercial

- Hard, heavy wood with high resin content good for fence posts, rail ties, utility poles
- Wood produces high heat when burned
- Tannins from bark used for leather tanning

WILDLIFE USES

- Seeds eaten by red squirrels, and mice and other rodents
- Seeds important for birds, such as red crossbills
- Important habitat for great grey owls
- Porcupines strip outer bark to eat inner bark, killing trees

FIELD NOTES

- Found throughout most of the forested areas of the NWT, though in low numbers and patchy distribution
- A tree of cold, wet places, occurring in muskeg and sphagnum bogs
- Grows with black spruce in open muskeg, and aspen and birch in better drained areas

FROM A DISTANCE

- A straight, slender conifer, 6-15 m tall, with a delicate, “feathery” appearance
- Crown narrows at top, pyramid-shaped
- Branches long, graceful, sparse; without needles, branches are “knobby”

UP CLOSE

Needles

- Short (1-2cm long), soft and flexible
- Grow in brushy clusters of 10-20 from woody knobs
- Pale green when new in spring, blue-green in summer, yellow in fall, shed in winter

Cones

- Small (1-2 cm long), oval-round, with 4-5 rows of scales
- Grow upright on branches
- Dark red in spring, turning leathery and brown as they age
- May stay on the tree for several years

Bark

- Thin, scaly, no ridges
- Grey to reddish-brown

