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Colorado spruce *(Picea pungens)*
Nebraska Forest Service

Colorado spruce *(Picea pungens)* is native to the Rocky Mountain region and the southwestern United States. It is the state tree of Colorado and has been widely planted in Nebraska and many other parts of the country. It is one of the most popular of evergreens because of the characteristic blue color of the leaves. Colorado spruce is often called "Blue" spruce or "Colorado Blue" spruce. The tree has been widely propagated and selected for color and growth habit. The blue color can range from a very bright blue to a dark green and the tree can often be mistaken for anything from white fir to Norway spruce. Mature forms can be dwarf, weeping, columnar, broad, or more commonly pyramidal. Colorado spruce has been very popular as a farm tree and it is usually rare to see a farm that does not have a Colorado spruce somewhere in the yard. Colorado spruce is not just an ornamental tree and is used for wind and snow protection around farm homes and buildings. It is not often used as a field windbreak however. Planted at about 16 foot intervals, Colorado spruce can make an impressive and beautiful wind break. The tree makes an excellent candidate for Christmas lights until it gets to tall.

To enjoy the tree in its true form pruning or shaping is not recommended. Trees are not usually limbed up, but allowed to branch to the ground throughout their life. The mature height of the Colorado spruce in Nebraska is usually around 50 feet. Wind and weather conditions may keep the tree smaller. Colorado spruce is a member of the Pine Family and is related to other Spruces, as well as the Firs, Larches, Pines, and Hemlocks.

Colorado spruce is very adaptable but will grow best in moist, well-drained acidic soils. It will, however, grow on more difficult sites including poor, clay, rocky, dry soils of acidic, neutral, or alkaline pH. The tree can also withstand the stress of drought and heat, which make it an excellent choice for Nebraska. It grows best in full sunlight. Colorado spruce is one of the slower growing evergreens but it will still provide a nice sized tree within ten years of planting.

Colorado spruce is generally a healthy tree, but like most spruces, it can suffer needle damage due to feeding by various spider mites. It also is subject to spruce gall aphid, causing its branch tips to die back, and several other diseases and pests may cause minor problems.

Colorado spruce is identified by its striking color but the needles are also characteristic. They are sharp and radiate outward from the twig. The tree is popular with the birds as a nesting place since the sharp needles can help deter predators. The new growth in the spring displays an even brighter blue that matures as the summer progresses.

Colorado Spruce is monoecious (male and female flowers on the same tree.) The cones can be seen easily when they mature and open allowing the seeds to fall to the ground. As with most of the pine family, Colorado spruce will usually not grow from seed naturally here in Nebraska.