

# The Virginia Pine

by Elaine Pugh, Fairfax Master Gardener

The Virginia Pine, *Pinus virginiana*, is a workhorse among native evergreen pine trees. Its main benefit is its ability to grow where no other evergreens and few other deciduous trees and shrubs will grow. It thrives in full sun in our heavy clay soils and on disturbed sites with poor soils. It is also called Scrub Pine, Spruce Pine, Jersey Pine, Possum Pine and Poverty Pine. And, yes, it is deer resistant. The native range of the Virginia Pine covers Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware and New Jersey, with extensions into neighboring states.

The Virginia Pine can be identified by certain features:

Look at the shape. The Virginia Pine is a small- to medium-sized tree. As a young tree, it looks more like a pyramidal Lego, and is sometimes used as a Christmas tree. When it matures, it becomes irregular, flat-topped and horizontal with no central leader but remaining low branched. It can grow to 40 to 80 feet (12-24 meters) in height and 10 to 30 feet (3 to 9 meters) in width. Its irregular appearance at maturity makes it an interesting specimen plant in a sunny native garden.

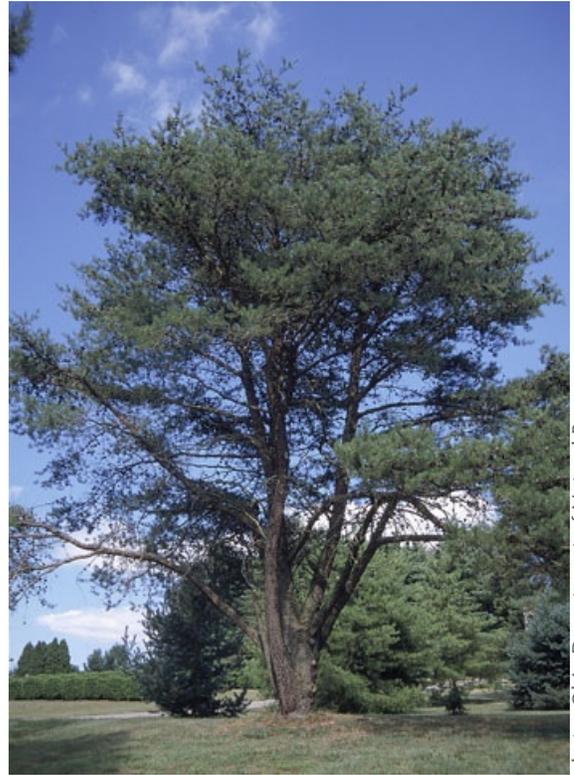


photo: Ohio Department of Natural Resources

Mature Virginia Pine

Look at the soil and sun orientation. The Virginia Pine is most often found in well-drained soils with acidic or neutral pH, and prefers sandy loams or heavy clay soils. It thrives on neglect and requires full sun. It is more tolerant of low soil moisture than most other pines, but does not tolerate wet soils.



photo: Suzanne Cadwell CC -BY\_ NC 4.0

Virginia Pine Cones

Look at the needles. The Virginia Pine has short, yellowish-green needles from 1 1/2 to 3 inches (4 to 8 cm) in length in twisted bundles of two\_ as compared to the Loblolly Pine with bundles of 3 needles and the White Pine with bundles of 5 needles.

Look at the bark. The Virginia Pine has orange-brown scaly bark when young, becoming small scaly plates with maturity.

Look at the flowers in springtime. The Virginia Pine has male and female flowers on the same tree, with the male flowers in yellow bundles near the branch tip. The female flowers are yellow to red, with a curved prickly present, turning green then brown for the cones.

Look at the cones. The small cones are 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 inches long (4 to 6 cm), conical to ovoid in shape with prickles, and usually in clusters of 2 to 4.

The Virginia pine produces cones in all parts of the crown, which take two years to mature and persist on the branches when empty for many years.

The Virginia Pine has many benefits for wildlife. The seeds are a food source for many birds. The trees provide cover for wildlife, and decayed areas of older trees provide nesting habitat for woodpeckers. It is a host plant for the Imperial Moth (*Eacles imperialis*).

For possible problems, from a mechanical standpoint, the trees are shallow rooted and prone to wind damage. From a disease and pest standpoint, while the Virginia Pine is susceptible to many of the same diseases and pests that plague other pines, it is generally trouble free.

The Virginia Pine's ability to thrive on poor soils makes it a pioneer for natural reforestation. It is an early successional species making the way for hardwood trees to arrive in later generations. The Virginia Pine provides cover for eroded areas, barren hillsides, strip-mined areas, infertile farmlands, abandoned fields, land damaged by fire and other disturbed sites. It often grows in pure stands, but can grow in association with other forest trees. See Associated Forest Cover in the USDA article.

The Virginia Pine definitely has its place in the overall landscape.



photo: Virginia Tech Dendrolog

Virginia Pine Needles

#### References

- [Virginia Pine](#), Virginia Tech Dendrology
- [Virginia Pine](#), US Forest Service Southern Research Station
- [Pinus virginiana](#), North Carolina State University Extension Plant Toolbox
- [Virginia Pine](#), Ohio Department of Natural Resources
- [Virginia Pine](#), University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, Forest Resources AgResearch and Education Center