



HORTICULTURE: IS THAT A FRASER OR YEW?

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Seasonal greens add aroma, fresh foliage, and interesting textures to our holiday decorations indoors and out. But sometimes, it's quite difficult to identify what materials we are using. Perhaps we create the scene by putting together those textures and colors that please us.

Plant identification, however, allows us to extend the life of those greens so that our efforts pay off. Below is the most basic primer that focuses on cone bearing plants and a few non-coniferous evergreens. Mostly these needle bearing plants are conifers of the pine family.

Most conifers shed needles gradually throughout the year. Exceptions are larch and baldcypress that shed all needles at once.

The term evergreen also applies to broad leafed plants that retain green foliage throughout the year like Rhododendrons, Andromeda, and others.

Characteristics of needle bearing plants:

- Erect trees and shrubs, not mat forming or creeping.
- Seeds are borne in woody cones; exceptions are yews with red and junipers with blue berries.
- Leaves are long and needle-like.
 - Pines and larches have needles appearing in bundles;
 - Firs have single needles.
 - Spruces have needles that are 4 sided.
 - Junipers have their needles arranged in opposing pairs or in whorls of 3; they are 3-sided, as are Arborvitae, red and white cedars, and dwarf junipers.
 - Needles that are thorn-like occur on gorse.
 - Conifers with flat needles include Balsam and Fraser firs, Eastern hemlock, and American yew.
 - Small and scale-like needles that hug the twigs are found in white cedars and junipers.

Fruits of conifers:

Yews and junipers have fleshy fruit that enfolds the seed[s].

Other conifers bear cones with the seeds at the base of the scales.

Techniques to prolong the life of cut greens:

- Use clean, sharp pruners. Immerse stems immediately in water.
- Crush the cut end of the stem to increase water uptake.
- Immerse greens completely to soak in water overnight to keep hydrated before arranging them.
- Before arranging, dry the greens, spray with an anti-transpirant [like Wilt-pruf]. Do not spray juniper berries, cedar, or blue spruce due to the damage this product does to the waxy coating.
- Keep cuttings and finished product in cool location until ready to use/display.
- Never display in direct sun or near a heat source [fireplace, wood stove, candles, vents, etc.].
- If any fruit or foliage dry out, remove and replace.

The best greens to use for indoor decorations are pines, firs, and cedar because they dry slowly and hold their needles.



(L-R) **Conifers** with needles in bundles of 3–5 include white and pitch pines. **Larch** with numerous needles found growing from spurs. **Cedar** with scalelike leaves that hug twigs and branchlets.



(L-R) **Spruces** have 4-sided needles. **Balsam** fir has flat needles as does the hemlock, Fraser and American yew.