

Academy Garden Club Thymes

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMY GARDEN CLUB OF LENOX

NOVEMBER 2023

Dear Members,

I hope everyone is enjoying the crisp fall weather.

We have had a tremendous sign up for the boxwood workshop at the November 14 meeting at the Lenox Community Center. For our first-time participants, you will leave with a boxwood topiary tree suitable for a tabletop inside your home, and you are reminded to bring:

- A container
- Clippers to shape boxwood branches
- Any decorations you wish to place on your tree (and things you need regarding the decorations, such as hooks or a glue gun)
- Cash or check for \$15 to cover the cost of boxwood and aquafoam which will be provided.

[If you didn't sign up but wish to participate, please let Dianne Romeo, tjromeo@verizon.net, know ASAP so that we will have enough boxwood on hand for everyone.] It is fine to attend if you don't wish to make a boxwood tree, you can still visit and enjoy refreshments.

At this meeting, we will try out a new method of considering routine items for approval/acceptance. It is called a "consent agenda" -- items included are sent out in advance of the meeting, discussed at the meeting only if there are questions or extraordinary items to highlight, and approved with a single vote.

This meeting, we will include the minutes and the financial report on the consent agenda. If people are comfortable with it, we can continue it in the future to streamline our meetings.

Hope to see you November 14.

Best, Susan

Horticultural Column

All About Conifers

Harriet Wetstone

I woke up freezing this morning, 38 degrees, the coldest yet. For a moment it actually felt like November and wreath making time. Even though there are still more than a few flowers, and it's still weirdly warm, I think perhaps it is time to think about conifers. For me of unreliable memory, which means reviewing which is which and who is who. I hope this will be useful to you as well!

Conifers, the gorgeous evergreens, are so much a part of our vision of winter. Of course, conifers are not the only evergreens - Illex or holly, rhododendron, boxwood, mountain laurel, andromeda - they also stay green. And, a very fun fact, the ginkgo is a conifer (!) that has 'cones' but loses its leaves. But these are tales for a different day.



I am thinking about Pine, and Spruce, and Fir, and Hemlock, all of whom are in the family Pinaceae. What defines these trees as conifers is not so much about being non-deciduous, that is, keeping their leaves, but all about their reproducing via cones rather than flowers. And they all have needles rather than broad leaves.

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Pinus (pine trees) is the largest genus within the Pinaceae family with about 126 distinct species. Pines, like other conifers, are easily defined by both their needles and cones.

All pine trees have needles that are flat and flexible, and grow in clusters called fascicles which are arranged in a spiral around the twig. Red pines have clusters of two needles, yellow pines have clusters of three, and white pines have clusters of five needles. Some pines, such as Torrey pine, or the longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) have needles as long as eighteen inches. And they are the only one of the conifers that has clusters.

Pinecones hang downward from the tree and are hard and woody.

When it comes to growth habit however, pine trees cover a range from low and carpeting to shrubby, to twisted trunks, to umbrella shapes, to giant forest trees.

Picea (Spruce trees) is a genus of about thirty-five species of trees which are found in the northern temperate climates. Spruce trees can be identified simply by their needles which are four sided and can be rolled between your fingers. These needles are short and stiff and often sharp, and they grow one at a time from a little peg or pulvinus that stays on the branch even if the needle drops off.

Spruce trees produce both male and female cones, but the male cones are more like catkins. The young female cones are said to be strikingly beautiful with pink and purple tones. The cones may start off in an upright position, but they hang downward as they begin to mature. and become smooth and flexible with thin green scales.



Huge surprise to me, spruce trees have a long history of being a nutrient rich food source! For example, the bright green new growth, spruce tips, are tender and taste of citrus and rosemary. They can be pinched off by hand and used in salads, or to make tea. Spruce Shortbread is said to be quick and easy to make and addictively good with a fruity flavor reminiscent of strawberries! There are even recipes for very young spruce cones, but I don't think I want to go there just now.

The Norwegian spruce is a classic Christmas tree, but spruces range from dwarf shrubs to incredibly tall. -as much as three hundred feet for the Sitka spruce.

Abies (Fir trees) are native to northern and central America, Europe, Asia, and north Africa. There are about 40 to 50 different species including the Douglas fir, the balsam fir, and the white fir.

Fir needles are typically short, fat, and flat, with soft blunt tips. They are attached to twigs typically along two rows.

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The cones of fir trees are large elongated oval shapes, and they grow upright on the branches like a candle. They can be purple, or green or blue, fading to a golden brown as they age. and they often ooze resin. They are almost never seen up close because they only grow toward the tops of the trees and disintegrate on the tree limbs.

Tsuga (Hemlocks) are a small genus of the Pinaceae family. It is thought the name Hemlock derives from the fact that its aroma is similar to the unrelated plant poison hemlock. But trees of the Tsuga genus are not poisonous. There are 8 to 10 species in this genus which is native to North America and central and eastern Asia.

Hemlock needles are short, flat, and blunt with rounded tips and they have a smooth shiny dark green upper side and parallel white stripes on the underside.

Hemlock cones are very small compared to pinecones or spruce. They are oval and woody, with scales that open as they grow, and they dangle down from their branches.

Okay! On to making wreaths!!

Thanks to: <https://leafyplace.com>;
<https://treehugger.com>;
<https://www.thespruce.com>;
<https://gardenerspath.com>. etc.

NOTE:

October 23, 2023 Minutes and October 2023 Financial Report - sent as separate documents with the November 2023 Thymes.