

# ERG— CONIFERS OF BEVERLY SHORES

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Conifers, particularly native ones, make up a tiny minority of the plants in our region of the world. What are conifers? Conifers, as the name suggests, are plants, mostly trees and shrubs, that bear their seeds in cones. Pine trees, spruces, and firs are the first ones to come to mind. Luckily, conifers, at least in these parts, don't include any major invasive species in Beverly Shores or the surrounding dunes. Scotch pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) is the only naturalizing, non-native conifer in the area.

Conifers are sometimes called “evergreens” and most hold on to their needles all year long. But some plants that are not conifers stay green all winter. Think of rhododendrons, holly or periwinkle. And some conifers lose their needles in the winter, like bald cypress.



*White Pine*

We have just a handful of native conifers here, at least one of which is commonly planted as an ornamental. The white pine (*Pinus strobus*) is a beautiful, tall pine tree with long, light-green needles and smooth branches. The needles occur in clusters of five. Touch the needles if you have a chance. They are one of the few pines that are soft to the touch. Giant white pines once grew abundantly in the dunes of Porter and neighboring counties, but in the 19th century, their valuable timber was used for the building of cities as the population moved westward. Now only scattered white pines remain in our forest. Trail 10 in the Indiana Dunes State Park, just west of “Paradise Valley,” has a segment of trail called “The Pinery” that refers to the white pines growing there. So few pines are now in the “Pinery” that we must have lost more since the State Park was created.

White pines do very well as ornamental trees in Beverly Shores. But they have one major vulnerability: deer love to browse on their needles in the winter. For small trees, this can be avoided by wrapping each tree every winter in chicken wire or burlap.



*Jack Pine*

Jack pine, *Pinus banksiana*, is our other native pine. Seldom grown as an ornamental, it thrives in our dunes. This species can be easily observed near Beverly Shores along the west side of East State Park Road in the more open high dunes and going into the wooded portion just south of the dunes. Jack pines have shorter needles than white pines that occur in clusters of two. Jack pines do not reach the monumental size that mature white pines can. If you are a bird watcher, you will recognize the name “jack pine” because this is the tree that the endangered Kirtland's warbler uses for nesting in Michigan.

We have two native species of juniper. One is commonly called “eastern red cedar,” (*Juniperus virginiana*). In the wild this tree can have a distinctly conical form when growing in the open but also takes on all sorts of interesting shapes depending on the environment in which it grows. Red cedars have very small, scale like leaves. Their “cones” are small and fleshy, like berries, and turn blue at maturity. If you are familiar with the smell of gin, crush this cone and you will notice its gin-like odor. The other juniper, called common juniper (*J. communis*), resembles the red cedar in vegetation and cones but has a squat, shrubby shape and short, prickly needles instead of scale-like leaves.

Bald cypress is an exotic in Beverly Shores. It is an Indiana native, but only in a few cypress swamps in the southernmost portion of the state. Still, when planted, especially in some of our wetter soils, it seems to tolerate our cold weather quite well. The bald cypress has soft needles occurring singly and paired along the stem, somewhat fern-like in appearance, and can become quite a tall and stately tree. The needles are deciduous and even turn a golden brown