

EVERGREENS

CONIFERS AND TREE SLICES

Evergreens are plants that retain live foliage (leaves or needles) from one season to the next. They supply color when other trees and shrubs are bare in the winter months.

Evergreens can be classified as broadleaf or narrowleaf varieties. Most broadleaf evergreens develop foliage that has some degree of width to their leaf. Mountain laurel (Pennsylvania's state flower), azalea, holly and boxwood are examples of broadleaf evergreens. The leaf size can vary greatly among the different types of plants. The seeds of most broadleaf evergreens are produced in an ovary, which ripens to form a specifically shaped and often colorful fruit.



Most narrowleaf evergreens have foliage that is quite long and needle-like or even scale-like on the stem. Narrowleaf evergreens that reproduce by forming a cone to produce seeds, rather than a flower, are called conifers. The eastern hemlock (Pennsylvania's state tree), pine, fir, spruce and cypress are examples of conifers.

Conifers do not lose all their foliage at one time like deciduous plants, and the life of any one leaf can range from one to six years, depending on the species of plant. New leaves or needles are produced each year, and some of the older inside foliage dies and drops to the ground. The leaves of conifers remain on the tree year-round and are replaced slowly and continuously rather than all at once. The smaller, tighter needles are more waterproof and wind tight than the larger, wider leaves found on broadleaf or deciduous trees. Conifers do not produce a spring leaf growth and can usually survive in poorer quality soils with less water.

There are always exceptions to the rule. Tamarack and larch trees are deciduous conifers, not evergreen. These trees have needles that turn a golden color and drop off in the fall in preparation for the cold winter months.

Make an Ornament

During the Christmas holidays, many people choose a conifer tree to decorate either inside or outside their homes. Popular choices for indoor trees include fraser fir for its soft needles, Colorado blue spruce for its strong branches to hold ornaments and scotch pine because it retains its needles longer after cutting.



When the holiday season is over and you are ready to remove your tree, you can use the trunk of the tree to create a memory and a decoration for use next year.

Materials

- Tree trunk cut into slices
- Sandpaper
- Twine
- Eye Hook

Decoration Choices

- Waterproof markers
- Paint pens
- Stamps and pads
- Black or white chalk paint
- Small stencils
- Foam paint brush

Have an adult saw the trunk of the tree into slices about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch thick. They can also predrill a hole for hanging or you can use the eye hook.



1

Prepare

If the slice is rough, use the sandpaper to smooth the front and back. Prepare the surface by painting it with chalk paint in a color of your choosing. Black or white works well. Wait for the paint to dry. You may choose to paint both sides. You may also choose to leave the surface bare.



2

Decorate

Get creative. Use paint pens, paint, stencils, markers or stamps to create words or images to remind you of this tree and the holiday. Be sure to add your name and the date somewhere on the tree slice. You can also add a clear waterproof sealant to preserve your design. Attach the eye hook if using, and twine for hanging.



3

Enjoy

Just because the holiday is over, you don't have to wait to display your ornament. Plus, you can also check out the life of the tree by looking at the rings in the slice. The rings in the tree slice tell a story of your tree's life. Check out the other Explore activities to find out more about dendrochronology, the study of tree rings.



Be sure to properly dispose of the rest of your tree by using the needles for mulch or chipping the tree to reduce trash in landfills.