

Pines of The Land Between

When imagining the wing swept shores and granite barrens of The Land Between, what species of tree is more iconic than the majestic, century old pines? The majority of our century old giants were felled during the early eighteen hundreds to support the Napoleonic wars: pine trees made great war ship masts and excellent, knot-free building material.

Old growth pine was also a prized source of lumber in colonial times because large trees produce knot-free boards that are relatively easy to cut and make for great furniture and housing. This desirability caused the vast pine forests to shrink both in size and in age across Ontario. But, many stands of pine still exist in the sandy granite pine barrens of The Land Between. Eastern white pines can live to be as old as 500+ years, with mature trees usually being around 200-250 years old, meaning there are still a few old trees out there that were already 10+ feet tall during Cartier's first expeditions.

Ontario is home to 4 species of native pines (Genus *Pinus*):

1. Eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*)

The great naturalist Henry David Thoreau is quoted as having said "There is no finer tree". The eastern white pine has inspired nature lovers in Ontario for centuries, enough that it is our official provincial tree. It can grow to over 40m tall and live 500 or more years! White pines can be identified by their long, skinny needles (6-12cm long) in bunches of 5, and their long 8-20cm long cones. White pines are generalists that can be found in most habitats in Ontario, but they prefer sandy soils. They grow fast and make great additions to native plant hedges.

2. Red pine (*Pinus resinosa*)

Most large stands of red pine in southern Ontario today date back to early reforestation efforts. Beginning in the 1920's, red pine began to be used as the tree of choice in reforesting abandoned farmland with loose, sandy soil. Red pine is a tolerant species and grows well under these conditions, making it popular to this day as a reforestation tree. However, red pine is not tolerant of pollution or road salts, and roadside stands have been subjected to die offs. You can identify red pine by its 10-16cm long needles in bunches of 2 and reddish-pink bark.

3. Jack pine (*Pinus banksiana*)

The most widespread tree in Canada, jack pine is a species primarily of the northern woods. It can be found in high densities in the north, but also in rock barrens in southern Ontario. Notable locations include the east side of **Algonquin Provincial Park** (a scene made famous by painter Tom Thompson), and the **Kaladar Jack Pine Barrens Conservation Reserve**. Jack pine can be distinguished from our other pines by its short bundles of two needles, 2-4cm long and slightly twisted, spreading out in a 'V'. Cones are tiny and yellowish brown, and only open when exposed to high temperatures such as forest fires.

4. Pitch pine (*Pinus rigida*)

Our rarest pine, pitch pine is found only in a small area along the St. Lawrence River in



eastern Ontario. Predominantly a pine of poor soils and southern pine barrens, pitch reaches its northern limit in Ontario. Pitch can easily be distinguished by its bundles of three needles; it is the only pine in eastern Canada to have needles in sets of three. **Charleston Lake Provincial Park** has some of the last remaining pitch pine in Ontario.

Invaders:

The most common non-native pine in Ontario is the invasive **Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*)**. Scots pine is visually very similar to red pine, but can be distinguished by its groups of two needles 2-5cm long, compared to the red pines 10-16cm long needles. **Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*)** and **Mugo pine (*Pinus mugo*)** also occur as cultivars.