

Plant Profiles: HORT 2242 Landscape Plants II

Botanical Name: *Larix laricina*

Common Name: tamarack, American larch

Family Name: Pinaceae – pine family

General Description: *Larix laricina* is native to the northern tier of North America and is considered one of the most cold hardy of trees. It is native in acidic bogs and swamps but can grow in more upland sites provided there is adequate moisture. According to The Morton Arboretum, tamarack, which is native in the Chicago area, is on the threatened species list for Illinois. For this reason they suggest it should never be collected from the wild and plants should only be purchased from reputable nurseries. *Larix laricina* is intolerant of shade, drought, heat or pollution. As a deciduous conifer it shares many of the same morphological characteristics as its European relative, *Larix decidua*; however, it is less adapted to landscape conditions and is infrequently used. There are a few unique cultivars available from specialty growers.

Zone: (1)2-4 or 5

Resources Consulted:

Davis, Becke. "ILCA Presents-Deciduous Conifers: In a Class by Themselves." *Landscape Contractor* June 2003: 29-36. Print.

Dirr, Michael A. *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants: Their Identification, Ornamental Characteristics, Culture, Propagation and Uses*. Champaign: Stipes, 2009. Print.

"The PLANTS Database." *USDA, NRCS*. National Plant Data Team, Greensboro, NC 27401-4901 USA, 2014. Web. 17 Mar. 2014.

Swink, Floyd, and Gerould Wilhelm. *Plants of the Chicago Region*. Indianapolis: Indiana Academy of Science, 1994. Print.

"Tamarack." *Trees & Plants*. Morton Arboretum, 2013. Web. 14 Feb. 2014.

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Creation Date: 2014

Keywords/Tags: Pinaceae, *Larix laricina*, tree, conifer, cone, needle, deciduous, tamarack, American larch



Whole plant/Habit:

- Description: The slender single trunk and slender branchlets creates an overall fine textured silhouette.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: September 27, 2010
- Image File Name: american_larch_2105.png



Whole plant/Habit:

- Description: *Larix laricina* has a pyramidal habit with horizontal to slightly ascending branches and drooping branchlets.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: October 29, 2008
- Image File Name: american_larch_1070375.png



Bark:

- Description: The smooth gray bark of youth becomes reddish brown and scaly with age.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: March 16, 2008
- Image File Name: american_larch_0456.png



Branch/Twig:

- Description: The 2-year old stems have prominent spurs typical of most larches. However, the stems of tamarack are more slender than most other species of larch.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: January 8, 2009
- Image File Name: american_larch_1100173.png



Bud:

- Description: The buds are rounded, glossy and reddish brown. Be sure to look at the small buds on this stem not the cones!
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: January 8, 2009
- Image File Name: american_larch_1100171.png



Flower:

- Description: *Larix laricina* is a member of the Pinaceae family. Though not true flowers the reproductive structures on larch are often referred to as such. Larches are monoecious; producing male pollen cones and separate female seed cones all on the same plant. The yellow male pollen cones burst open when the foliage begins to emerge in spring. The female cone emerges a rich rosy purple color (photo on left) which is a welcome sight in spring!
- Image Source: Steven Katovich, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org
- Image Date: Unknown
- Image File Name: 5369979-SMPT.jpg



Cone:

- Description: The cones of *Larix laricina* are egg-shaped, very small (usually less than one inch) and have fewer scales than other larch cones. The size and shape of the cone is an excellent identification feature. Similar to other larches, the upright cones go through color phases of purple, green and finally brown.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: September 12, 2004
- Image File Name: american_larch_7377.png



Leaf Number/Attachment:

- Description: The needles are in clusters of 12-30 emerging from short spurs of 2-year old shoots. On fast growing young shoots the needles are attached singly.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: September 12, 2004
- Image File Name: american_larch_7372.png



Leaf Number/Attachment:

- Description: The soft blue/green needles of summer give way to golden yellow in autumn and then abscise (fall off).
- Image Source: Steven Katovich, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org
- Image Date: Unknown
- Image File Name: 1388008-PPT.jpg



Winter interest:

- Description: The winter interest would not be considered overwhelming to most but the fine textured pyramidal form is more evident in the dormant months.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: January 8, 2009
- Image File Name: american_larch_1100005.png



Special ID feature(s):

- Description: The pyramidal form, horizontal branches, drooping branchlets and short spurs help to identify the genus *Larix*. The exceptionally small cones and fine texture help to identify *Larix laricina*.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: January 8, 2009
- Image File Name: american_larch_1100174.png