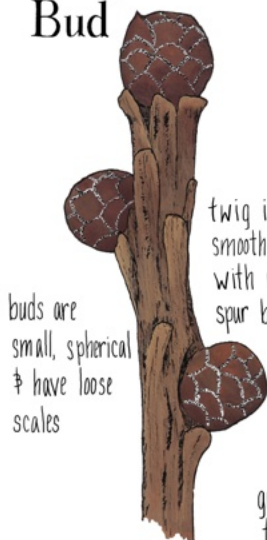


Tamarack

Larix laricina

Twig & Bud



buds are small, spherical & have loose scales

twig is smooth & slender with numerous spur branches

Habitat

often found in swamps, poorly drained bogs, & marshes of boreal forests & moist upland forests

Leaf

deciduous conifer; turns golden yellow in autumn



needle-like leaves arranged in tufts (~10-30 per tuft); flattened dorsal surface & keeled bottom form a triangular leaf cross-section



needles are soft; can't be rolled b/w the fingers

Bark

gray & smooth on young trees; mature trunks reddish purple-brown w/ small, tight, rounded scales

Flower

monoecious

technically doesn't produce flowers, instead cone-like structures called strobili



female strobili emerge within a cluster of leaves, erect on a short, curved stalk

male strobili are globular to oblong in shape w/ pollen sacs & a loose collar of papery scales

Fruit



cones are spherical or egg-shaped; scales rounded, stiff, & curved inward



TREE OF THE MONTH

Tamarack • *Larix laricina*

ALSO KNOWN AS: AMERICAN LARCH, EASTERN LARCH, HACKMATACK

Tamarack (*Larix laricina*) is a deciduous, coniferous tree in the Pinaceae, or pine, family found in the northeastern U.S., most of Canada, and the interior of Alaska. It commonly reaches heights between 40 and 70 feet and lives to about 180 years old. This species self-prunes, meaning the tree sheds any branches that are no longer productive and have become a drain on its resources. For this reason, one-half to two-thirds of its trunk will usually be clear of branches by the time it reaches 25 to 30 years of age. Tamarack displays an alternately whorled branch arrangement, with the branches originating from the trunk slightly ascending at the top, widely spreading in the middle, and slightly drooping below.

Tamarack is typically found in swamps, bogs, and marshes within boreal forests, but it can also thrive in moist upland forests. As a shade-intolerant species, tamarack often grows in even-aged stands. In its northern range, it frequently forms extensive pure stands, while in much of its U.S. range, it appears as isolated pure stands or makes up a minor component of other forest types. In the northeastern U.S., tamarack is commonly found in both open and forested bogs, although it rarely dominates these communities.

The needle-like leaves of tamarack are soft and straight, with a slightly flattened dorsal surface and a triangular cross-section. Unlike the closely related pines (*Pinus*), tamarack needles can't easily be rolled between the fingers. The needle-like leaves grow in dense clusters from short **spurs**; however, they attach to the twig singularly. They turn a golden yellow in autumn and drop off, leaving the tamarack bare throughout winter until the needles regrow in the spring. There are about twenty deciduous conifers, but tamarack is the only species native to New England.

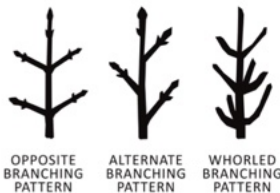
The bark of young tamaracks is gray and smooth. Mature trunks are a reddish brown-gray color with small, tight, round scales. These scales are thin and often break away, leaving visible patches of purple-red inner bark. Twigs of tamarack are slender and smooth, with numerous spur branches, and range from a light orange-brown to grayish-brown. The dark red winter buds are round and small, with loose scales.

Tamarack trees are gymnosperms, meaning they do not produce flowers. Instead, they develop cone-like structures known as strobili. As a monoecious species, tamaracks bear both male and female reproductive structures on the same tree. The strobili emerge from the tips of short, spur-like **lateral shoots** during April and May, coinciding with the appearance of new needles. Male strobili are typically rounded to oblong in shape and have creamy white pollen sacs surrounded by brown, papery scales at the base. After releasing their pollen in early spring, they wither away.

In contrast, female strobili are egg-shaped and upright, emerging with a cluster of leaves on short, curved stalks. They start as a vibrant hot pink, gradually transitioning to maroon. Once pollinated, the female strobili turn into small, spherical cones with stiff, rounded scales that curve inward.

spurs: short, stout, tubular growths that attach to a plant stem and can bear leaves, buds, flowers, and fruit

lateral shoots: a twig or branch coming from an axillary (side) bud on the stem of a plant



Tamarack is often confused with European and Japanese larch—two closely related species planted as horticultural trees in North America.

The genus name *Larix* comes from the Latin word *lārix*, which means “larch.” Tamarack’s species epithet, *laricina*, refers to “laricinus” and is derived from *larix* and *inus*, which essentially means “larch-like.” The common name “hackmatack” is the Algonquian name for the species and means “wood used for snowshoes.”

Native Americans of northern New England and Canada used tamarack for making toboggans and snowshoes and as stitching for birch-bark canoes.



Tree of the Month is sponsored by Berkshire Environmental Action Team, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization located in Pittsfield, MA. Find more Trees of the Month at www.thebeatnews.org.