



Pine Forest

This forest of white pines along this old road was planted in the 1960s, when Valley Forge was still a state park. White pines are a coniferous or cone-bearing tree that are also considered an 'evergreen' because they keep their needles or foliage all year round. The majority of trees elsewhere in the park are deciduous trees, which shed their leaves each year during winter.

The branches of white pine grow in whorls around the tree trunk, and you can tell their age by counting these whorls from ground level to the top of the tree- each whorl indicates 1 year of growth. Pines and other conifers hold warmth and are better wind blockers throughout the colder months than deciduous trees, making them frequent shelters for deer and other mammals in the park. Pines also have been used as screens throughout the park to block views of the surrounding urban development.

One-third of the plants in the park are non-native plants and a portion of those are invasive species. A *non-native* plant is one that is not originally found in a particular habitat but that is causing no harm; while an *invasive* species adversely affects the habitats it invades either economically, environmentally or otherwise. The most dominant invasive species seen in *this* pine forest is the oriental bittersweet vine. This vine is a deciduous, woody, perennial plant. The leaves are alternate, glossy, and nearly as long as they are wide. This plant is native to Eastern Asia, and was imported to America by people who appreciated the decorative qualities of its berries. Unfortunately, it grows and smothers shrubs and trees, eventually killing them from excessive shading or breakage. As it climbs up trees, the bittersweet weighs them down, which can lead to uprooting and blow-over during high winds and heavy snowfall. Oriental bittersweet infects forests, woodlands, fields, coastal areas and marsh edges.