



Common Trees

Great Basin National Park has a wide variety of plant life due a wide range of altitude and highly variable precipitation. While some people simplify tree types by referring to everything with needles as “pine trees” and anything with leaves as a “shade tree,” closer examination will reveal a fascinating depth of diversity. The brief descriptions and foliage illustrations given here will assist you in identifying Great Basin’s most common trees.

Deciduous trees

Quaking Aspen: The only broad-leaved tree found in high elevations, aspens round leaves shimmer and shake with the slightest breeze. Falls sets aspen covered hillsides ablaze with bright gold.

Narrowleaf Cottonwood: Long leaves are pointed at the tip and rounded at the base with a finely toothed edge. The bark is smooth with a yellow/green tint. The tree is found in moist soil.

Water Birch: Look for this tree with sharply toothed leaf edges near streams in the park. Its distinctive bark is smooth, shiny, and reddish.

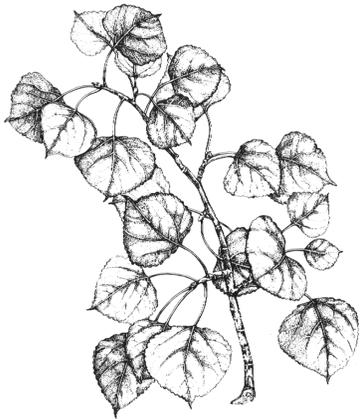
Curleaf Mountain Mahogany: A small tree commonly found at mid-elevations. Its small, leathery, and waxy leaves curl under at the edges. The fuzzy and curly tails of its seeds make it easy to spot in late summer.

Serviceberry: A star-shaped flower or purple/black fruit will help you pick out this tree. It is found in moist areas and often has multiple trunks. The broad leaves are rounded at both ends and toothed.

Western Chokecherry: Leaves of this tree have toothed, elliptical leaves. Its five petaled flowers hang in long clusters. The bitter fruit is a shiny red to black with large stone. Like most deciduous trees in the area, it prefers moist soil.

Rocky Mountain Maple: Rocky Mountain or Dwarf Maple is found in moist soils. Its leaves are divided into three pointed lobes or leaflets. The bark is fairly smooth and grey/brown.

Willow: Six species of willow can be found along the creeks and moist drainage areas of the park. Look for the “willow,” long, narrow, leaves.



Quaking Aspen



Narrowleaf Cottonwood



Water Birch



Curleaf Mountain Mahogany



Serviceberry



Western Chokecherry



Coyote Willow



Rocky Mountain Maple

Conifers

Juniper: Junipers are easily distinguished by their scale like needles and round blue fruit. Two species are found abundantly in the park's lower elevations often growing in communities with pinyon pines.

Douglas Fir: Not a true fir, the Douglas can be confusing because of its flat needles. However, the needles lack the upward curve. Cones are easily found and easily identified by the tiny "tails" protruding from them.

White Fir: Commonly found in mid-elevations, this tree is identified by its flat and flexible needles which always curve skyward. The cones sit vertically above branches at the top of the tree and disintegrate after developing their seeds.

Engelmann Spruce: This high elevation tree is the only spruce species found in the park. Its needles are square, stiff, and sharp. Fallen needles leave small stubbs behind on the twig. Red cones are densely packed at the top of the tree.

Singleleaf Pinyon Pine: These trees are the only pines whose needles do not grow in clusters. The needles are round, sharp, and firm. The heavy, woody cones produce one of the areas favorite treats for animals and humans alike, the pinyon pine nut.

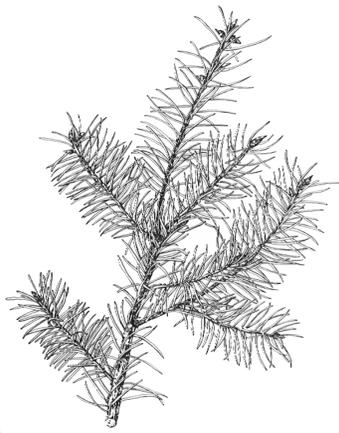
Ponderosa Pine: A large tree of mid-elevations. Needles are very long (up to eight inches) and generally found in groups of three. The bark is deeply furrowed and smells much like vanilla.

Limber Pine: Limbers grow at high elevation in the company of Engelmanns and Bristlecones. Their needles are found in clusters of five and are often concentrated at the ends of the branch. Young limbs are smooth with a light grey tint and very flexible. The trees are often twisted and gnarled at extreme elevations.

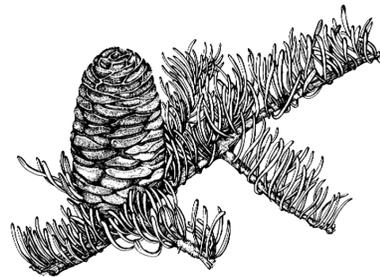
Bristlecone Pine: This most famed high elevation tree is known for its frequently contorted shape. Bristlecones also have five needles per bunch with clusters of needles at the branches end. Bristlecone needles, however, are much shorter than Limber needles and densely packed together. The color is also much brighter and darker than the limber. The cone, not surprisingly, has tiny barbs, hence the name, Bristlecone.



Utah Juniper



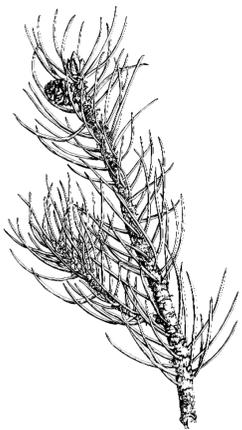
Douglas Fir



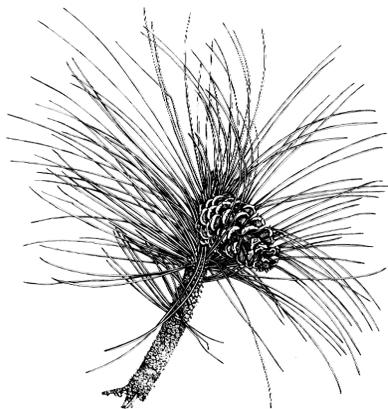
White Fir



Englemann Spruce



Singleleaf Pinyon Pine



Ponderosa Pine



Limber Pine



Bristlecone Pine

Noteable Exotics

Non-native species of trees are often found near former homesteads. The greatest concentration is certainly at the park's visitor center. White poplars of European origin shade the lawn, planted long ago by an unknown caretaker.

Below the visitor center are apple, pear, and apricot trees. Many are remnants of the orchard planted by Absalom Lehman in the late 1880's.