

featured tree

Photo by Rod Nichols, ODF



This young Ponderosa Pine resides on the grounds of ODF headquarters in Salem. Stately Ponderosa Pine trees also grace the “Forests for Oregon” cover this issue.

Ponderosa Pine

(Pinus ponderosa)

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One of the most common native conifers growing east of the Cascades, the Ponderosa pine is valued for its versatility of wood products, source of food and habitat for many species of wildlife, its pleasant odor and its beauty.

Needles, cones, bark

Needles are five to 10 inches long, almost always found in bundles of threes, and grouped in “tufts” at the ends of branches. They are gray-green, olive or yellow green, sharp, stiff but flexible, and remain on trees for three years before turning brown and shedding.

The Ponderosa’s classic pine cones, most used for ornamental purposes, are three to six inches long, tan to reddish-brown, and prickly.

Young trees have furrowed, “jigsaw puzzle” dark reddish-brown to black outer bark. In mature trees, the bark ranges from deep yellow to russet-brown with deep fissures, thickening to up to four inches, which helps it resist wildfires.

Trees prefer warm, sunny weather, but can stand harsh, cold winters. They’re shade-intolerant, and prefer moist, well-drained soils but can adapt to various soil conditions and are drought tolerant once established. Ponderosa pines are straight-trunked with a wide open irregular cylindrical crown, grow at altitudes of 5,000 – 6,000 feet, and can be long-lived, exceeding 500 years.

The wood is hard, strong, straight, and fine-grained, is highly desirable and versatile, used for residential construction, factory and shop products, paneling, woodworking and furniture.

Its seeds are eaten by many species of birds and small mammals. Leaves and twigs browsed by deer and elk, and many species of birds use pine snags for nesting and roosting. 