

Larix decidua - European Larch (*Pinaceae*)

The larches are unusual in that they are conifers that lose their leaves in the autumn. Before the leaves drop, they turn a spectacular yellow. Larches are often the last trees to color in the autumn.

FEATURES

Form

- deciduous conifer tree
- pyramidal in form with a strong central leader in youth, but becoming irregular with age
- horizontal branching
- to 75' tall x 30' wide
- slow to medium rate of growth (12-18" per year)
- long-lived

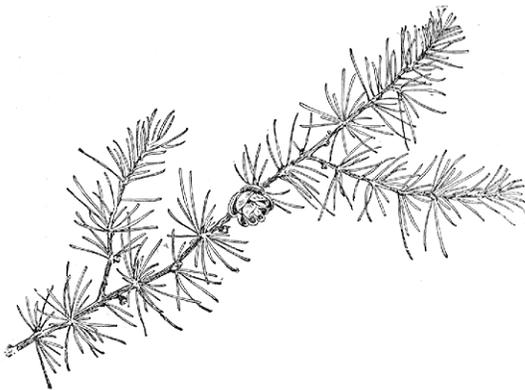


Culture

- full sun to partial sun, but protected from harsh, cold winds
- performs best in light sandy soils that are slightly acidic
- tolerates moist and clay soils but not wet areas
- easily transplanted
- casebearers and sawflies may be serious pests
- propagated by seeds, grafts, and cuttings
- limited availability in B& B

Foliage

- flat, needle-like, 1" long, keeled below
- bright green provides good contrast with darker green of other plants



- leaves clustered on small spurs or arranged spirally on strong terminal shoots
- cast moderate to light shade
- yellow autumn color

- among the last trees to turn color in autumn
- one of the few deciduous conifers (along with *Taxodium distichum* - Bald Cypress and *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* - Dawn Redwood)

Flowers

- monoecious
- develop with the foliage in the spring
- staminate (male) are yellow
- pistillate (female) are red

Fruits

- small upright cones that appear on trees after 20 yrs. or so
- may persist on the tree for several years

Twigs

- slender, glabrous, yellowish brown
- many short spurs in spiral arrangement
- horizontal branches with pendulous new growth

Trunk

- single main trunk with bark that is dark gray-brown in rough, loose, scaly plates
- branches droop as the tree grows

USAGE

Function

- specimen, massing (but with ample space between plants)
- in parks and large areas
- especially effective in winter

Texture

- fine texture in foliage and when bare
- open density in foliage and when bare

Assets

- effective winter display
- graceful form
- attractive early spring color

Liabilities

- slow growth
- does not tolerate heat well
- cones may be a litter problem
- somewhat susceptible to ice breakage

Habitat

- Zones 4 to 6
- Native to Europe

SELECTIONS

Alternates

- pyramidal deciduous conifers (e.g. *Taxodium distichum* and *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*)

Cultivars - Variants - Related species

- Larix decidua* 'Pendula' - weeping form
- Larix kaempferi* - Japanese Larch - the fastest growing larch. Size 80' x 30'. The young shoots have a reddish coloration. Avoid high pH or dry soils.
- Larix laricina* - Tamarack - Native to northern half of Eastern North America, very cold hardy, but intolerant of heat; tolerates wet soil well, and grows in alkaline soil