

JACK PINE – *Pinus banksiana*

In an exposed, rocky area, you come across a twisted, gnarled tree loaded with knobby grey cones. You have found a jack pine, the most northerly of Canadian pines. These cones have a unique property that allows them to stay on the tree and accumulate for years. They are serotinous: unless they are heated to a high temperature, they stay tightly closed, protecting the seeds inside.

Fire renews the boreal forest, and jack pines are the first trees to take hold after a burn. Their resin-sealed cones protect the seeds from flames, then open after the fire passes. Seeds that have been stored for years fall on a sunny, fertile bed of ash: perfect conditions for the growth of new saplings.

HUMAN USES

Traditional

- Pine needle tea, high in vitamin C
- Pine needle powder treats frostbite, burns, blisters
- Pine gum good for colds
- Crumbly, rotted wood used as baby powder
- Cabin logs, planks for toboggans and boats

Commercial

- Lumber, pulpwood, furniture, doors
- Oils for antiseptic, disinfectants, insecticides
- Decorations and crafts (wreaths, potpourri)

WILDLIFE USES

- Squirrels, mice, many birds eat seeds
- Porcupines eat bark
- Pine needles favoured by spruce grouse
- Snowshoe hares eat young seedlings

FIELD NOTES

- Rocky, exposed or recently burned sites
- Grow best on open, sandy soils
- Hybridizes with close cousin Lodgepole Pine

FROM A DISTANCE

- Medium evergreen, often ragged-looking
- Commonly full of grey, weathered cones

UP CLOSE

Needles

- Short, stiff, sharp, twisted, yellow-green
- Paired, joined at base

Cones

- Curved inwards, point to end of twig
- Usually in pairs
- Most closed until opened by fire
- Knobby scales with tipped spine

Bark

- Dark grey to reddish-brown
- Flat scales
- Older bark deeply grooved

