



Great Places Green Spaces

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Key topics: What's up with my Pine Tree/ Ready for a Fresh Look

By Josh Larson

What's Up With My Pine Tree? (It's Not Always What You Think!)

Welcome to the fall edition of the Great Places Green Space newsletter.

As the leaves start to change color and fall, our phones light up with calls about a common and confusing phenomenon: browning, dropping pine needles. Most of the time, a pine losing needles is a distress signal, but in the Fall, that's not always the case.

The Great Needle Drop (It's Totally Normal)

You were probably taught that pine trees are evergreens, meaning they never lose their needles. This is a partially true statement that can lead to confusion. The term "evergreen" can be misleading, it doesn't mean that every needle is *always* green; it just means these trees don't drop all their needles at once.

Like many evergreens, pines go through a process called Fall needlecast. This is a fancy way of saying they are shedding their oldest needles before winter arrives.

Why the annual clear-out? Well, as those older needles age, they become less efficient at doing their main job—making food for the tree. In the plant world, if you can't pull your weight, you get the boot! This is a natural, necessary way for the tree to refresh itself and get ready for its Winter dormancy period.



Is It Normal Shedding or a Problem? Here's How to Tell

How can you know if you're looking at natural Fall needlecast and not something more serious like Dipododia Tip Blight or Dothistroma Needle Blight? We will suggest some simple methods that tree owners can utilize to make a quick judgement. If you are still unsure at all, call an ISA certified arborist or your local foresters to make an evaluation.

It's Fall Needlecast When...

- It happens in the Fall (perfect timing, right?). For the purposes of this newsletter, let's define Fall as September - November.
- The loss is happening on the inside of the branch, closest to the trunk.
- The tips of the branches look perfectly healthy and bright green but the inner needles are turning yellow, brown or red.

"There are two times of the year: autumn and waiting for autumn" – Unknown



What's Up With My Pine Tree?

Uh Oh, It's Not Fall! Spotting the Real Issues

If you notice needles dying or browning *outside* of the Fall window, especially on branch tips, you might be dealing with a different foliage problem. Here's a quick peek at the three most common culprits:

Diplodia Tip Blight

- o Look for stunted and brown branch tips starting around May or June.
- o This disease often affects Ponderosa or Austrian pines, especially when the tree is stressed.
- o Stress can be caused by challenging weather patterns, damaging storms, or mechanical damage to the tree.
- o If you want to get up close and personal, you can look for pycnidia (super tiny black dots) on the cones or needles, which are a strong sign of this issue.

Dothistroma Needle Blight

- o The telltale sign here is the banding—look for tan and green spots on the needles that turn into red bands with yellow stripes.
- o Older infections can cause the needles to turn a gray-brown color and bend at a sharp, awkward angle. This disease is usually most severe on the lower and interior parts of the tree.

Pine Wilt

- o This affliction only impacts exotic pines such as Austrian pine, Scotch pine, and mugo pine.
- o If your tree was seemingly healthy in the Spring but turned brown by Fall, it could be pine wilt.
- o All needles on the tree turned completely brown.

What to do if you suspect an issue with your tree

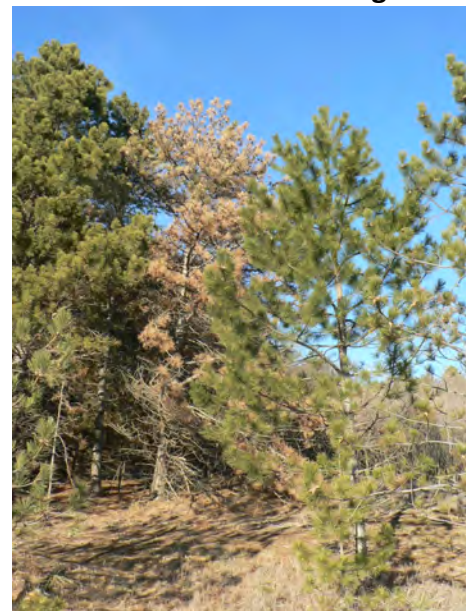
If you suspect your tree is unhealthy, don't panic! Get a hold of your region's community forester or an ISA certified arborist and have them out to take a closer look. They will help you determine if treatments are needed or not.



Diplodia Tip Blight



Dothistroma Needle Blight



Pine Wilt

"Love the trees until their leaves fall off, then encourage them to try again next year." — Chad Sugg



Ready for a Fresh Look?

Ready for a Fresh Look? 3 Underdogs You Should Plant in South Dakota!

Let's be honest, walking through most South Dakota neighborhoods feels like an evergreen family reunion. We've all got the classics, or at least see them every day:

- Ponderosa Pine
- Black Hills Spruce
- Colorado Blue Spruce
- Austrian Pine
- Scotch Pine

While these old faithful have served us well, they've started showing some serious flaws lately. Which means its time to broaden our horizons. Here are three magnificent, slightly under-the-radar trees that deserve a spot in your yard:

Siberian Larch (The Tree That Looks Dead But Isn't!)

The Siberian Larch is one of my personal favorites for shaking up the landscape! Hailing from Western Russia, this non-native champ is cold-hardy and drought-tolerant once it gets settled.

- **The Look:** It has soft, pleasant green needles that grow in dense, clusters on the branches.
- **The Size:** It can reach up to 60 feet tall with a 25-foot spread on good soil.
- **The Big Twist:** The Siberian Larch is a *deciduous* evergreen! That means it turns a stunning bright yellow in the fall, then drops all its needles for the winter.

Pro-Tip: If you plant this one, you might want to invest in a sign that says, "**Don't worry, I'm a Siberian Larch! I'm supposed to look dead in the winter.**"

The Norway Spruce (A Magnificent Yard Specimen)

Looking for a striking spruce that stands out? Look no further than the Norway Spruce. This sun-loving non-native is commonly found on the landscapes of Scandinavia.

- **The Size:** This majestic tree can soar to 60 feet tall with a generous 30-foot crown spread. (Make sure you have enough room for this beauty!)
- **The Soil:** It's a good option when it comes to tolerating both acidic and alkaline soils, which is a huge plus for those of us here in Western South Dakota.
- **A Small Catch:** While tough, it's not quite as drought-tolerant as some other species. Give it a good home and a little extra love, and it will reward you by becoming a magnificent centerpiece in your yard.





Ready for a Fresh Look? Cont.

Rocky Mountain Douglas Fir



Norway Spruce

Rocky Mountain Douglas Fir (The Nostalgic Native)

Believe it or not, the Rocky Mountain Douglas Fir used to be the "it" tree in South Dakota! You can still find grand old examples in historic cemeteries and long established city parks, a testament to its popularity around the turn of the last century.

- **The Range:** This native tree has a large natural range, stretching from Canada to Mexico and into the Pacific Northwest. This wide adaptability is great news for us.
 - **The Key to Success:** Because its natural range is so huge, you must make sure your tree comes from Rocky Mountain seed sources. These are the varieties best adapted to our hot, dry summers and cold winters.
 - **The Size:** It can grow up to 70 feet tall with a 30-foot crown spread. It prefers good moisture to thrive, but once established, it has proven itself capable of surviving even severe droughts.
- Go ahead, try something new! Your landscape (and your future self) will thank you for giving these hardy, gorgeous underdogs a chance.

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"If you don't like fall, you can leaf me alone." -Unknown