



# native plant society of bc

## *Abies grandis* (grand fir)

**Meaning:** *Abies* is Latin for “fir” and *grandis* is, not surprisingly, Latin for large, great, grand.

**Description:** *Abies grandis* is, as might be expected, a tall tree that can grow to 80 metres in height. Its needles are flat, with rounded and notched ends. The yellowish green cone sits upright on branches in the tree’s crown. The bark is smooth and grey-brown in young trees, but becomes furrowed as the tree ages.

**Habitat:** Grand fir grows in stream bottoms, valleys and mountain slopes in BC.

**Range:** *Abies grandis* is native to western North America. In Canada, it is found only in British Columbia. In the United States, it is found in Washington, Oregon, northern California, Idaho and Montana.

**Wildlife notes:** Grand fir is used by a variety of wildlife both for food, shelter and nesting. Its needles are a major part of the diet of blue, ruffed, and sharp-tailed grouse. Squirrels, other rodents and some birds such as nuthatches and chickadees eat its seeds. A variety of species, from deer mice to woodpeckers to martens make their nests in grand fir.

**First Nations use:** Just about every part of *Abies grandis* – roots, needles, pitch, bark, branches and wood – was used by many First Nations. A few examples: Decoctions, infusions and compounds were used to treat medical ailments from sore throats to stomach troubles to tuberculosis. Branches were used as bedding, bark was used to make canoes or to make dyes; the knots were used to make halibut hooks.

**Gardening use:** First, as always with native plants, do NOT collect plants from the wild. Instead, check the Native Plant Society of BC’s resources page at [www.npsbc.org](http://www.npsbc.org) to find a retailer that may sell *Abies grandis*. Grand fir has long been a favourite ornamental (it’s often grown as a Christmas tree) and has significant value in restoring disturbed sites.

**Other notes:** Grand fir was first described by Scotch botanical explorer David Douglas, who collected specimens of the tree during his travels in the Pacific Northwest from 1823 to 1827. The original name for the tree was “*Pinus grandis*”, but that was in a time when pretty much every conifer was called “*Pinus*”; *grandis* was the specific epithet given by Douglas, in reference to the tree’s impressive stature.

