

The Cones That Almost Never Fall
by Lynne Brosch

Look up to the top of your fir trees and see all those beautiful pine cones pointing up to the sky. It looks like an excellent crop this year. Have you ever seen them fall to the ground? Not likely. Fir cones usually disintegrate on the trees in late September into October. Cones produce from 185 to 295 seeds apiece. The seeds are then distributed by the wind. Seed production varies by the age and size of the tree. Many fir diseases and insect damage begin in the tops of trees and can cause loss of cone production. Fair to good crops of cones are produced every 2 to 5 years with an exceptional crop maybe only every 5 to 9 years. Older trees are especially prone to damage from wind and snow and lose their tops. However, these trees are capable of redevelopment and a resumption of the ability to bear cones. Fir seeds that drop before permanent snow cover have the best chance of germination. Seedlings do best in shaded areas where the soil is not as hot and dry. They often succumb to fungi, cutworms, trampling and browsing by animals if not the drought and heat. White fir trees begin bearing cones at about 40 years of age and can continue for some 300 years. Look hard to find a fir cone on the ground. If you do it's a lucky find!

For more information:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/tree/abicon/all.html>

http://www.calflora.org/cgi-bin/species_query.cgi?where-calrecnum=3

Red fir

<http://www.plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=ABMA>

http://www.na.fs.fed.us/pubs/silvics_manual/Volume_1/abies/magnifica.htm

White fir fact sheet and plant guide

http://www.plants.usda.gov/factsheet/pdf/fs_abco.pdf

http://www.plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/pg_abco.pdf