

Bristlecone Pine



The Bristlecone pine is famous as a long-lived tree, growing in exposed and harsh conditions on high mountains. Two varieties of bristlecone cone live in the lower 48 states, the Great Basin Bristlecone pine of California, Nevada and Utah, and the Rocky Mountain Bristlecone pine of Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona. The Rocky Mountain Bristlecone pine is found from around 7000 feet above sea level to treeline, near 11900 feet (3640 m) in central Colorado. It can survive on rocky and windy ridge-tops. The Bristlecone pine grows to large size in forest settings, and even grows in meadows on occasion. Bristlecones may be prostrate near treeline, or reach 40 feet high in a protected forest. Bristlecone pine may be mixed with Limber pine in woods up to several hundred acres, or with other trees typical of its elevation. Bristlecone and Limber pine can survive where winter winds sweep the high country free of snow, while the neighboring spruce and fir are buried several feet deep. Ancient trees have often have extensive die-back, with wind-sculpted dead limbs, and a few strips of living bark and associated branches with green foliage. Bristlecone pine can be very long-lived. A Bristlecone five feet high may be over 500 years old. Bristlecone pines near South Park are the oldest trees in Colorado. The oldest known tree in Colorado is 2456 years old (in 2014), dating from 442 BC. It grows on a mountain along the south edge of South Park. The oldest trees are found in arid locations with reduced precipitation, on well-drained rocky, south facing, slopes. It can grow in cool places with very little water, where it grows so slowly that the growth rings are very narrow. One of the oldest trees near South Park, over 2202 years old, has 90 annual rings per inch (35 rings per cm). The oldest trees are 2.5 feet (80 cm) across near the base, or more. The trees in this area are the oldest living Rocky Mountains Bristlecone pines, and the oldest trees in Colorado. A Bristlecone pine in California is about 4600 years old, possibly the oldest individual tree on Earth.

Hardiness: Winter hardy to USDA Zone 3-7

Colorado Native

Cold Hardy: Excellent

Drought Tolerance: Fair

Alkali Soil Tolerance: Good

Windbreak Suitability: Excellent

Wildlife Benefit: Good

Mature Height: 20-40 ft

Mature Width: 15 ft

Growth Rate: Slow

Highest Elevation: 11000 ft