

Balsam Fir

Abies balsamea

Balsam fir, a common Christmas tree, is native to Aitkin County. Balsam fir needles are ½"-1" long, flat, and fragrant. Seed cones are 2"-4" in length. These trees are an important source of wildlife habitat; moose will readily eat the buds and twigs of balsam fir. Deer, bear, timber wolves, lynx, bobcats, hares, spruce grouse, and songbirds are often found in balsam fir, as these trees provide thermal protection for wildlife. As a crop, balsam fir may be used for pulpwood. Individual boughs are harvested for wreaths and young trees are used for Christmas trees. A row of closely spaced balsam fir will be a natural windbreak.

Height: 40' to 60'

Under favorable conditions, balsam fir grows less than a foot per year. Maximum height is attained at an age of approximately 50 years.

Planting environment:

Soil composition: Many; loam, silt loam, clay loam, sandy

Soil moisture: Moderately well-drained to well-drained

Sunlight: Very shade tolerant (will thrive in shade)

Balsam fir may be planted in shady areas, such as beneath existing trees or sheltered by other features.

Balsam fir seedlings should be planted 6'-10' apart.

Maintenance:

Management of balsam fir after planting varies depending on landowner goals. If grown for wildlife habitat, mixed stands of balsam fir and other tree species reduce the potential for damage from spruce budworm and provide better wildlife habitat than land containing only balsam fir trees. If planting for harvesting, consider thinning trees to promote growth.

Top diseases/pests:

1. Spruce budworm
2. Heart rot

