



J&L Garden Center

The All Season Gift
and Garden Center

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Pine Tree - Fall Needle Drop



Each September and October we receive many calls from gardeners concerned about the lower needles, and the inner needles, of their pine trees turning yellow and brown. Do not be alarmed if your pine trees, yews, junipers, and arborvitae plants shed their innermost needles. This is natural each fall - the inside needles will turn yellow and then drop off the branch. More needles will turn yellow and drop off a plant after a stressful summer than after a normal summer. Don't be too surprised if a lot of needles turn yellow and drop off your plants this fall because of the hot summer weather. **Fall Needle Drop** is just a natural part of gardening.

Contrary to the name 'evergreen', pine trees do not keep their needles indefinitely. Pine trees only keep an individual needle for two or three years. After that time period, the tree stops feeding the old needles. The needles die in the fall, turn yellow or brown, and drop off the tree. That is why the older pine trees are always bare in their center, and why homeowners are always upset with the needles making a mess on the ground around their trees.



Every spring, a pine tree grows a new set of needles. Every fall, the pine tree sheds its oldest set of needles. Some years a pine tree may shed two sets of old needles, making the fall needle drop even more apparent.

Needle drop in newly planted trees, and in trees under stress, is more noticeable than in the older and larger trees. However, all pine trees (Austrian Pine, Scotch Pine, Mugho Pine, Blue Spruce, Alberta Spruce, Junipers, Cedars, Cypress, and Yews), lose their oldest needles each fall, even the healthy trees.

Broadleaf evergreen plants also drop their oldest set of leaves. However, most broadleaf evergreens shed their old leaves in the spring, as soon as the plant produces new leaves. **Leaf drop** in the spring doesn't seem to be as noticeable as **needle drop** in the fall. Broadleaf evergreen plants, just like pine trees, do not keep their leaves indefinitely. They only keep individual leaves for one or two years before they shed them. Boxwood, euonymus, holly, rhododendron, and laurels are just a few of the broadleaf evergreens.



Pine Tree Care

Pine trees do not need as much fertilizer, or water, as deciduous trees. In fact, if you fertilize a pine tree too much, or water it too often, you can make it grow too fast. The tree will not be the size and shape that it should be. Many gardeners wonder why their dwarf mugho pine, the one that is only supposed to grow 2' to 4' tall, is six feet tall. It is



not because it is the wrong shrub. It is usually because the plant got stimulated to grow faster than it was supposed to grow.

Fertilize new pine trees once a year, until the tree is two or three years old. The best type of fertilizer for pine trees, even better than fertilizer stakes, is a slow releasing fertilizer such as **Dr. Earth All-Purpose Fertilizer**. Slow releasing fertilizers do not stimulate excessive growth as readily as fast acting fertilizers can. Dr. Earth fertilizers also contain many beneficial bacteria that help tree roots to overcome stressful soil conditions and help the tree to grow properly.

After the pine tree has been planted for two or three years, look at the new growth. If the tree is growing the rate it should be, do not fertilize it. Also, if your pine tree is in the lawn, take into consideration the amount of fertilizer you are giving it each time you fertilize your lawn. After the first two or three years, the only fertilizer that a pine tree may need is iron. You can give iron to trees any time of year, spring, summer, or fall. Extra iron will not over stimulate trees, it just helps the tree to overcome stress and helps the tree to maintain its proper color.

Do not fertilize deciduous trees and shrubs in the fall. However, if you have a pine tree, or a spruce tree, that appears to be under stress, go ahead and fertilize it with a tree or shrub fertilizer that contains iron, such as **Dr. Earth All Purpose Fertilizer**. Fall fertilizer does not stimulate new fall growth, or harm pine trees, the same way it can stimulate new fall growth and damage deciduous plants.

Be sure to water your pine trees occasionally during the fall, at least until the snow begins to fall. Evergreen plants and trees need a little more water, and a little more attention, than deciduous plants in the fall.

Fall is the best time to move plants. Transplant deciduous plants when they are dormant; after they drop their leaves. Pine trees and shrubs can be transplanted a little earlier than deciduous plants; but it is still a good rule of thumb to wait until leaves drop off surrounding deciduous plants before moving pine trees.