



# Friends of SNOW CANYON

## What's That Plant??

**Utah Juniper is the most predominant tree in Utah,** covering nearly one-fifth of the land area in the state. Together with Pinyon Pine, it is a primary member of the Pinyon-Juniper Woodlands community which is a major habitat type in the Southwest.

It is also commonly called Cedar, after which Cedar City and Cedar Breaks were named. It is easily recognized by its evergreen foliage and fleshy blue cones commonly referred to as "berries".

### Look For...

**Foliage:** The evergreen leaves are dark green and scale-like. On seedlings, the juvenile leaves may be needle-like.

**Cones:** Junipers are conifers, bearing male and female cones, usually on the same plant. The male cones shed pollen in early spring, usually in February and are wind pollinated. If you suffer from early spring allergies, pollen from Utah Juniper may likely be the culprit.

It takes around 18 months for the female cones to ripen. At maturity, they are fleshy and blue with a whitish waxy bloom, resembling a small berry. The cones contain a single seed (rarely two) and are dispersed primarily by jackrabbits and coyotes.



**For centuries, Juniper trees have been a valuable resource** for food, seasoning, medicine, tools, firewood and a structural material for houses and fences. Native Americans used the fibrous, shredded bark to make a slow match, start fires and to construct strong bows.

## Utah Juniper *Juniperus osteosperma* Cupressaceae — Cedar Family



**Habit:** Shrub or small tree reaching 10 to 20 feet or more in height. Young plants tend to be rounded or pyramidal. With age, the plants open up and become more picturesque with twisted and gnarled branches.



### Did you know?

**Gin is made** by distilling malt or grain and infusing it with juniper "berries" and other botanicals such as Angelica root and Coriander seed. There is now a gin distillery in Salt Lake City that produces a gin, appropriately named Jack Rabbit.



**The Pinyon or Piñon Pine is the other half in Pinyon-Juniper Woodlands.** Pines are cone bearing, evergreen trees whose needles are clustered in bundles or fascicles, with usually two, three or five needles per bundle.

Eleven species of Pinyon Pines are found in the southwest United States and Mexico. The most common types found in Utah are the Single-leaf Pinyon and the Colorado Pinyon.

### Single-leaf Pinyon Pine

(*Pinus monophylla*) is the most prevalent Pinyon in the Great Basin.



**This is the world's only one-needled Pine!**

**Cones:** It takes just over two growing seasons (26 months) for the cones to produce seeds. In the first year, emerging cones appear as small, spiny spheres. After being pollinated, they grow to around ½" in diameter. The following spring, the cones begin to enlarge to about 2-3" in length. During the summer, the cones turn a brilliant emerald green color and produce a glistening, sticky pitch. In late summer, the cones dry out, the scales part and the mature seeds are displayed in the open cones.



**Habit:** This pine is found at elevations from 3,300 to 7,500 feet. They are slow growing, low spreading plants that reach a height of around 15 to 30 feet or more.



**Colorado Pinyon Pine** (*Pinus edulis*) is a **two-needled pine** that grows in eastern Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona. These two species may hybridize with each other where their ranges meet. On hybrid trees, you may find a mixture of one and two-needled fascicles.

Pine nuts that are sold commercially usually come from this species. Currently, the BLM allows individuals to harvest up to 25 pounds of pine nuts per year for personal use without having to secure a permit.

The Piñon Pine was a valued food source for early Native Americans. The nutritious seeds were gathered and stored for later consumption.

### Jay and Pine Intertwined



The Pinyon Jay and Pinyon Pine share more than a name; their fates appear to be inextricably linked. The two have a mutually beneficial relationship and a strong dependence on each other for survival, summarized as "tree feeds bird and bird plants tree". Even the time and location of the Jay's breeding is tied directly to piñon seed availability.

When piñon seeds become ripe in late summer, flocks of Pinyon Jays sweep through the woodlands to gather and cache the seeds. These intelligent birds can determine what seeds are viable by bill clicking and weighing the seed. "Good" seeds are dark brown while light tan seeds are empty. Jays have an elasticized esophagus that can hold up to 50 seeds. They store many of the seeds for later use by burying them. Some of the buried seeds are not used and are able to grow into new trees. Pinyon seeds rarely germinate in the wild unless they are cached by jays or other birds and animals.

**Have you found the "hidden" Pinyon in the Park? Hint:** Check out Marker #19 on the trail for which it was named and LOOK UP!!