
Wildflower Spot – March 2011
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

LOBLOLLY PINE

Pinus taeda

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This tall evergreen tree grows rapidly, reaching up to 115 feet. The bark is reddish brown to blackish gray, furrowed to form broad, elongate, flat-topped plates. The needles are long (up to 10 inches) and yellowish green, in bundles of three needles per cluster. Young female cones are yellow and near the growing point of the twig; mature cones are slender and oblong when closed. Cones persist for about a year after shedding seeds.

Loblolly pine is native in 15 southeastern states, often forming pure stands in swamp margins and well-drained slopes of rolling, hilly uplands. The tree grows in eastern and central counties of Virginia, and is particularly abundant on the Coastal Plain. All pines are wind-pollinated; both the pollen and the seeds of loblolly pine blow everywhere. Requiring sunny locations, abandoned fields are excellent nurseries for this species which often invades old agricultural lands.

The pollen released by the male cones in early spring covers surfaces with a yellowish powder. Researchers have found the pollen can travel as far as 1,800 miles from its source and remains viable despite exposure to moisture, cold and



UV radiation from sunlight. Although suspected of causing allergic reactions, very few people are affected.

One of the meanings of the word loblolly is “mud puddle”, where these pines often grow. Among the fastest-growing southern pines, it is extensively cultivated in forest plantations for pulpwood and lumber. The wood is light brown and coarse-grained, widely used for home and general construction, especially for house framing. The Cherokee also used the wood for lumber, and for canoes and carvings.

Trees of the pine family are larval hosts for over 200 species of butterflies and moths. ❖

Photo: Loblolly Pine (*Pinus taeda*) taken by Helen Hamilton
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