



[Schedule](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[Forum](#)

# May 2024

Volume 56

Issue 4



Blue Spruce, South Park, CO

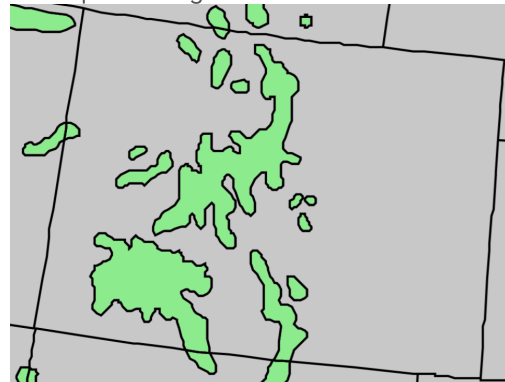
## Picea pungens

### Blue spruce/ Colorado blue spruce

*David Fletcher, RMBS Member At Large*

Picea pungens, also known as Blue Spruce or Colorado Spruce, is one of two spruces native to Colorado. It has a native range including Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming but Colorado has the largest range by far and is the state tree of Colorado!

Blue Spruce range in Colorado



### Collected Origins

The Blue Spruce is a popular tree in the nursery trade as well as a seasonal Christmas tree sold in most states. Take a trip to your favorite nursery and you will find a variety of different cultivars with distinct traits. Many of these cultivars were likely brought to cultivation by Jerry Morris who would go out and collect branches from trees with unique characteristics for grafting stock. One of the sources of desirable growing traits was from what's called a "broom" growing on a tree. A broom is a mutated growth that can happen from UV radiation changing DNA. Also, a disease living in the tree similar to how wood burl forms can cause a change in growth patterns. One antidote I came upon was Jerry noticed that trees on the downhill side of a road had more brooms. He wondered why and thought it was when cars run on leaded gas and the lead laden gas fumes traveled downhill and messed with the growth of the tree!



While it's called Blue Spruce, it's not always blue. Many of the cultivars collected tend to be blue. If you were to view them in the wild, most are green and some with just a bit of blue. But every once in a while you will come upon a tree that is so blue that it is beyond belief!

While the brooms made it into the nursery trade and can be used for bonsai, collected trees are preferred as nature did its best initial styling for us!

You can find them typically on land that falls in the Riparian zone. Riparian zones are typically found along rivers and streams as well as other areas of high soil moisture. In Colorado we have a few rare riparian/wetland zones known as a fen. A fen is a wet area with water from an underground source. Think of a spring but much bigger and spread out.

Many of the Blue spruces that you may have seen in our RMBS member collections have been sourced from a fen or an area similar to a fen. The hostile environment of these fens have a unique way of churning out root character as well as otherworldly branch growth. This comes from a combination of the unique layers of soil consisting of sand/gravel/cobble layers from glacial sources combined with water movement above and below the surface of the topsoil.



**Collected by Jerry Morris**  
**Styled by Todd Schlafer**  
**Estimated to be 200 years old**  
**Artist: Pauline Ayers-Menk**





High Creek Fen, South Park, Colorado

The fens in Southpark are frequented by a large herd of approximately 1500 elk in the area. The land is part of the migration path as they move between high mountain grazing in summer to the low parklands in winter. With an average weight of 600 lbs for a mature adult elk grazing around these trees, that's gotta make an impression! Also if you have ever driven through south park on I-285 in the winter when the winds are howling, you probably know how harsh it can get. Winds up to 100mph have been observed in this area. All this to create some great specimens of bonsai trees!

### **Blue spruce vs Engelmann spruce**

Colorado has another native spruce, the Engelmann spruce (*Picea engelmannii*). Engelmann spruce typically grow at high elevations up to treeline where blue spruce tend to prefer lower elevations. It can be hard to distinguish them apart sometimes as they both can have a similar leaf color. In fact they can hybridize with each other.

### **Care**



Overwinter protection from wind and cold. Containers are buried in gravel and covered with pine needles mulch.

While Blue Spruce are cold hardy trees, growing them in containers makes them more vulnerable to stressful conditions not found normally when in the ground. One way to mitigate this is to create conditions closer to the natural environment they live in. Wintering them buried in gravel and mulch is recommended. Providing a wind break also helps control the stress the tree

experiences. Also don't forget the "spring bonsai shuffle" dealing with our bipolar spring weather!

### **Continued reading and additional information**

Much has been written on care for spruces and can be found on the internet. Don't forget: If you have a particular question about your tree, reach out to our RMBS community!

For anyone interested, The High Creek fen is protected land by The Nature Conservancy but you can visit.

<https://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/places-we-protect/high-creek-fen-preserve>

A few spruce care articles:

<https://www.bonsaiempire.com/tree-species/spruce>

<https://www.bjornbjorholm.com/care-and-maintenance-guide-for-native-us-spruce-and-fir-bonsai/>

Past RMBS presentation by Will Kerns. Includes information ethical collecting as well sourcing local material.

[https://www.rmbonsai.org/\\_files/ugd/e28426\\_ef845ea8fb224ad19...](https://www.rmbonsai.org/_files/ugd/e28426_ef845ea8fb224ad19...)

---

**NEW:** Subscribe to the RMBS Google Calendar to stay up to date on upcoming events!

*Instructions for:* [Outlook](#) [iPhone](#) [Mac](#)

[View Calendar](#)

---

## **Upcoming Events**

[Schedule](#)



### **May Meeting**

**Monday, May 6**

Gates Hall, DBG

7:00 PM

Toni Koski - Soils

Austin Heitzman - The Bedrock of Bonsai Display

## **Membership**

Individual: \$50/year

Family: \$75/year

**Welcome to our new members!**

*Matt Thomas (Westminster)*

*Pamela Gerard (Denver)*

[rmbonsai.org/join](http://rmbonsai.org/join)

*Adam Laughrey (Longmont)  
Clunes McRae (Colorado Springs)  
Shane Milek (Arvada)  
Dylan Behan (Lakewood)*



**Rocky Mountain Bonsai Society**

9878 W Belleview Ave

PMB 3146

Denver, CO 80123

Unsubscribing from this email will remove you from our entire mailing list. You will no longer receive any updates about events or our monthly newsletter.

[Unsubscribe from all emails](#)

