



Bristlecone Pine

Pinus aristata

Pine Family (Pinaceae)

Zones: 2-6

Full Sun

Very Low Water

Location: Amphitheatre, Childrens' Garden, Fragrance Garden, Medicinal Garden, and Rose Garden

Names like "Prometheus" and "Methuselah" are eye catching; I would love to meet them. There might be a chance of my meeting Methuselah, but Prometheus was cut down accidentally in 1964 when 4,862 years old. Bristlecone Pines are the oldest known dated living trees in the world and are native to the Inter-mountain West.

There are two main species of Bristlecone Pine. *Pinus longaeva* or Great Basin Bristlecone has a geographic range at higher elevations (up to 11,000 feet) in California, Nevada and Utah while *Pinus aristata* or Rocky Mountain Bristlecone grows in Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona. Prometheus and Methuselah are of the *longaeva* species, while we grow *Pinus aristata* here in the Garden.

When looking at these pines, the first thing you notice is the arrangement of the short needles around the branches in bundles of five. They resemble raccoon tails without the stripes. Also interesting is the white resinous exudation along the leaf that looks like tufts of floating seeds that have been captured by the leaf. Now you can recognize this tree wherever you go with these mental images.

The advantages to growing this tree are the dark bluish green color of its foliage as well as its adaptation to alkaline soils, low rainfall amounts and short growing seasons. Bristlecone Pines prefer good drainage since too much water may kill them. Their very slow growth is an advantage in a small yard where you want a conifer that does not take a lot of space and is very picturesque. They are also beautiful as container plant.