Hort Report January 2018

My sister, who lives in North Carolina, often shares plants with me that really shouldn’t grow this far north, like ‘Loblolly’ pine, Pinus taeda. The word ‘Loblolly’ means ‘mudhole’, and that’s where this tree often grows. Pinus taeda is native to the Southeastern US, so you won’t see too many of them, but I’ve been told Longwood Gardens has two. This fast growing pine tree has a straight trunk, can reach seventy feet, and is important to the lumber industry. It’s known commercially as Southern Yellow Pine.

I love the stiff, slender ten inch long needles, and the bark which grows in broad, reddish-brown plates. The cones, which have sharp scales, are stemless, so they sit right on the branches, like weirdly shaped birds. Like most pines, they lose their lower branches as they grow, so I have a host of shade-lovers growing under it. Under its spreading branches I have oakleaf Hydrangea, lace-cap Hydrangea, mini Hostas, Mahonia, Anemone, Rodgersia, and Ligularia. All these perennials benefit from its shade.

Evergreens can be hard to identify, but one clue is pine needles are round, while fir tree needles are flat. Also, pine needles grow in clusters. Loblolly needles are in bundles of three.

This is a beautiful tree, and worthy of space in your garden.