

Abies - Growing Guide

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Silver fir

There are around 50 species of silver fir of which Burncoose Nurseries currently stocks only a few. Abies are evergreen conifers which dominate the northern mountain regions of Europe, Asia and N. America. They differ from Picea in their disc-like leaf scars and their erect cones which break up while still standing upright on their branches. Male and female 'flowers' or stroboli are produced on the same tree in spring and the female seed cones are often an attractive blue-purple or violet-purple well into the autumn before turning brown later and shedding in winter or in the following spring. Silver firs can reach a great size and are generally conical in shape with branches in more or less regular whorls and flattened in a horizontal manner.

Some years ago the theme of Burncoose's Chelsea stand was 'Endangered in the Wild'. Included with this were several species of Abies which were planted at Caerhays after the show. The three with the most impressive black and purple cones have proved to be *Abies pinsapo*, *Abies homolepis* and *Abies forrestii*. Hopefully we will soon propagate these successfully and offer them in the catalogue.

Abies koreana is the most popular species which we sell because it is slow growing and can be seen at the entrance to the Burncoose gardens. The leaves are dark green above and gleaming white underneath. Numerous small cones are produced each year; even on pot grown plants. The cones are around 3-4in long and a most striking violet-purple. After 30 years growing with us the tree is only 15ft or so tall. This makes it a wonderful architectural or ornamental species for smaller gardens.

Abies nordmannia, an ever popular Christmas tree, is really a forestry or windbreak tree and has 6in long greenish-brown cones. It originates from the Caucasus and Turkey.

Abies procera, noble fir, is an American native and can grow up to 80-120ft in the UK. Its value is as an imposing landscape tree. The cones are also green and brown and around 6in in height.

Abies concolor, white fir, and *Abies fraseri* are both US species as well. The former has smooth grey bark with bluish-green foliage and the latter is a rather rarer species with dense crowded leaves, a conical crown, and purple cones.

All *Abies* require fertile moist soil in a well-drained location. This, with neutral to slightly acid soil, will allow them to perform to their full potential.

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