



# The Evergreen

By Logan Nelson with excerpts from  
*The Meaning of Trees* by Fred Hagender and  
*The Healing Energy of Trees* by Patrice Bouchardon

**Symbolism:** Our Connections with All of Life

**Astrological Association:** Saturn

The genera of spruce (*Picea*) and fir (*Abies*) are close relatives within the pine family (Pinaceae). Many traditions, both practical and spiritual, have not distinguished between them; hence they are considered here together.

**History of Practical Uses:** Many Native American peoples, such as the Paiute, use spruce and/or fir boughs as flooring in sweat houses and the Malecite and Micmac use them for camping bedding. The Algonquin shred and pound roots to make cords and ropes, while the Cree and Micmac use the wood for framing timbers, toys, paddles, tent frames, cabins and roofing. The resin produces pitch, which the Malecite and Ojibwa utilize in water-proofing roofs and canoes. Many Europeans used spruce and fir in much the same way.

**History of Traditional Uses:** Since ancient times, evergreens have been part of mid-winter ceremonies. The Japanese mark the New Year week by putting two pine trees of the same height on each side of the front door. According to Shinto tradition, the divinities live among the branches of trees, so the pine trees are placed in the hope of attracting them and their blessings to the house.

Many cultures have celebrated the shortest day of the year and the triumph of light over darkness. The Egyptians decorated their houses with palm leaves at this time and the Romans brought branches of

evergreens into their homes for the winter festival of Saturnalia.

In the Middle Ages the approach of the Feast of the Nativity was the signal to go into the forest and cut down a pine tree to put up in the house. Thus Christianity incorporated an ancient tradition where the rebirth of light after the mid-winter darkness was linked with an evergreen tree, which symbolized the continuity of life.

The first specific reference to this pine tree as a "Christmas tree" dates from the 16th century, when it was the custom in Strasbourg to decorate the trees with colored paper, fruit, and painted eggs. Gradually this custom spread across the globe: German settlers fighting in the Civil War imported the custom to the U.S., where in 1804 soldiers at Fort Dearborn hauled trees from the woods to their barracks at Christmas time.

For the indigenous Siberians of the Altai Mountains, the World Tree is a gigantic spruce that reaches from the navel of the Earth to the highest region of the heavens, thus connecting the three main layers of the universe: the spirit world, the earthly plane and the underworld. The spruce is also the centre of sacred teachings among the indigenous tribes of southern Canada, who call it the Peace Tree. Its lessons are: to cooperate and exchange with other life forms; to be connected with the earth and the heavens; and to exhibit a joyful and tranquil humility.

May your holidays and winter season be **EVERGREEN!**