

Safe Pine Needle Tea

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How to Make Safe, Healthy Pine Needle Tea



Miniature Eastern White Pine

Pine needle tea is an ancient beverage with pleasing aromas, a light, crisp flavor, and health benefits. It's very easy to make, and best of all, it doesn't cost a thing! You can go out and gather the fresh needles yourself. Before making pine needle tea, however, you must do your homework. Certain species of pine, or other plants mistaken for pine, can be downright poisonous. Just a few minutes of research will have you identifying the safe, medicinal pines in your area.

History and Health

Native North Americans have used pine needle tea for centuries, especially in the north. Beneficial all year round, it was prized most during the winter to prevent illness and provide nourishment. When white settlers came to the continent they often suffered from scurvy—a disease resulting from vitamin C deficiency—until the natives introduced them to pine needle tea. Pine needles (and many other parts of the Pine tree) contain several times more vitamin C than fresh orange juice, and can easily meet your daily need of it.

Other health benefits of pine needle tea are reputed to include:

- ◆ Vitamin C
- ◆ Vitamin A
- ◆ Relief for symptoms of colds
- ◆ Relief from infections
- ◆ Decongestant
- ◆ Use as an antiseptic when chilled
- ◆ Improvement for fatigue
- ◆ Mental clarity
- ◆ Aromatherapy

Pine needle tea is said to provide relief for many other conditions as well; this article has an impressive list of studies done on the benefits and chemical characteristics of pine needles.



Making Pine Needle Tea

First you need to identify a pine tree in your area that is a safe species and has not been sprayed with any chemicals or treatments. I will describe how to do this in the next section. Here's how to make your tea!

1. **Identify!**
2. **Collect a bundle of young, green needles** from the end of the branch. About a handful is fine. Older needles are acceptable too, if needed.
3. **Remove the brown, papery sheath** from all the needles.
4. **Chop the needles into smaller pieces.** This is actually optional. It speeds the process by aiding the release of the pine juices and oils. I have also seen the tea made with whole needles and it turned out wonderful.
5. **Heat water to just before boiling.** Avoid boiling the pine needles. Vitamin C is heat sensitive and doing so could lower the vitamin content.
6. **Steep tea for about 10 minutes.** Pour the hot water over the needles. If you chopped the needles into very small pieces, you may want to strain them out after steeping. You wouldn't want to accidentally suck one of those down, those things are sharp! You can steep it longer if you are trying to relieve acute symptoms.

7. **Enjoy hot or cold!**

The tea will have a very pale color, or be almost clear, but the aroma and flavor will be very evident! It is best to make pine needle tea fresh each time. Storing it could reduce the vitamin content and change the flavor. You could also make a larger batch and pour it into a bath to enjoy the pleasant aromas.

Many species are safe to experiment with for tea, and you may find you prefer one flavor over another. **White Pine** is largely regarded as the best option for pine needle tea.

Avoid These Dangerous Species!

As I mentioned before, it is essential that you identify the pine before you use it in a tea. Not all conifers or "evergreens" are pines! While many pines are perfectly safe to use, certain others can sicken you. Other non-pine evergreens can be poisonous too. Also make sure the trees have not been sprayed with chemicals or treatments, because you'll be drinking it! Before collecting needles, make sure your tree is NOT one of the following:

- ♦ **Ponderosa Pine**; also known as Blackjack, Western Yellow, Yellow, and Bull Pine. This pine contains *isocupressic acid*, which is known to cause abortions in cattle. It is feared the same could happen in humans, so pregnant women and those who might be pregnant are often advised not to consume pine needle tea, even though not all species have this acid. Others that do contain it are:
- ♦ **Lodgepole Pine**, or **Shore Pine**; *isocupressic acid*
- ♦ **Common Juniper**; *isocupressic acid*
- ♦ **Monterey Cypress**, or *Macrocarpa*; *isocupressic acid*
- ♦ **Common Yew**; another evergreen, all parts of this tree contain *aniline* and *taxane*, both toxic substances that can cause abdominal cramps, dizziness, rashes, skin discoloration, and in extreme cases death. *Taxane* is used in chemotherapy. That doesn't sound fun, does it?
- ♦ **Norfolk Pine**, or **Australian Pine**; known to be poisonous to house pets. Research the common Pine trees in your area!



young pine cones

Other Edible Pine Parts!

Did you know that essentially the entire pine tree (the non-toxic ones, of course!) is edible? The needles can be used in tea or chewed raw. The pitch or sap is also high in vitamin C. Pine buds, pollen, young pine cones (before they become hard), pine nuts, and the inner bark are all edible! (Though harvesting the last one damages the tree).

Resources

[Garden Guides](#)

[Studies on Pine Needle Tea](#)

[Another great Hubpage on pine needles: their qualities, uses, research, and history.](#)



Find some pine needles!
Source: author



Remove brown, papery shafts from the end of the needles.
Source: author



Cut the needles into smaller sections.
Source: author



Place the needles in a mug and steep with not-quite boiling water.