

### Pacific yew (*Taxus brevifolia*)



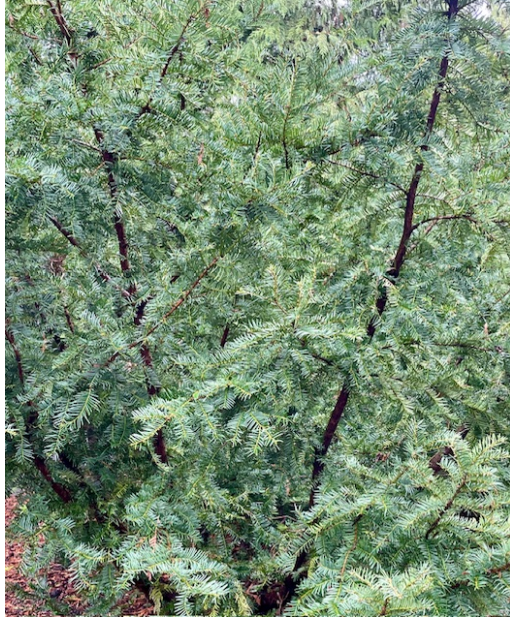
First Nations call Pacific yew (*Taxus brevifolia*) 'chief of the forest'. It plays a key role in the various ecosystems it lives in - from the northwest coastal ecosystem to the interior one. This long living but slow growing, small tree or shrub spends its life in the shade under old growth trees.

How did it get that 'chief of the forest' name? Probably this is what old growth trees call it too. Pacific yew benefits the old growth trees in its ecosystem by passing on nutrients through the mycorrhizal network. It is a strong and dependable player in keeping its ecosystem healthy. And that is thanks to its rot resistant wood and enduring root system. This forms stable, longterm networks for nutrient exchange through the soil.

There is a good chance water and its inhabitants sense 'the chief' in the Pacific yew. With a tangled and rot resistant root system, Pacific yew helps to provide slope stability, as well as water quality in riparian regions. This function is essential for aquatic life which is sensitive to changing riparian conditions - especially salmonids and microorganisms.

And wildlife in the deep snow of British Columbia's interior know by instinct that 'the chief of the forest' keeps them fed and protected. Moose, deer and caribou eat its leaves and calve their young under the shelter of this tree. Being an understory tree, the foliage of yew under old-growth canopies is easily accessible. This is life saving in winter when their usual foraging places are not accessible.

Pacific yew still is chief today, but it is struggling. Pacific yew has faced damage from logging, death from collecting its bark for cancer medicine and now is confronting climate change.



*Pacific yew in the Woodland Garden at Vandusen.*

[https://www.conifers.org/ta/Taxus\\_brevifolia.php](https://www.conifers.org/ta/Taxus_brevifolia.php)

<https://www.centralcoastbiodiversity.org/western-yew-bull-taxus-brevifolia.html>

<http://nwconifers.com/nwlo/yew.htm>



*Note male pollen cones on our shrub.*