

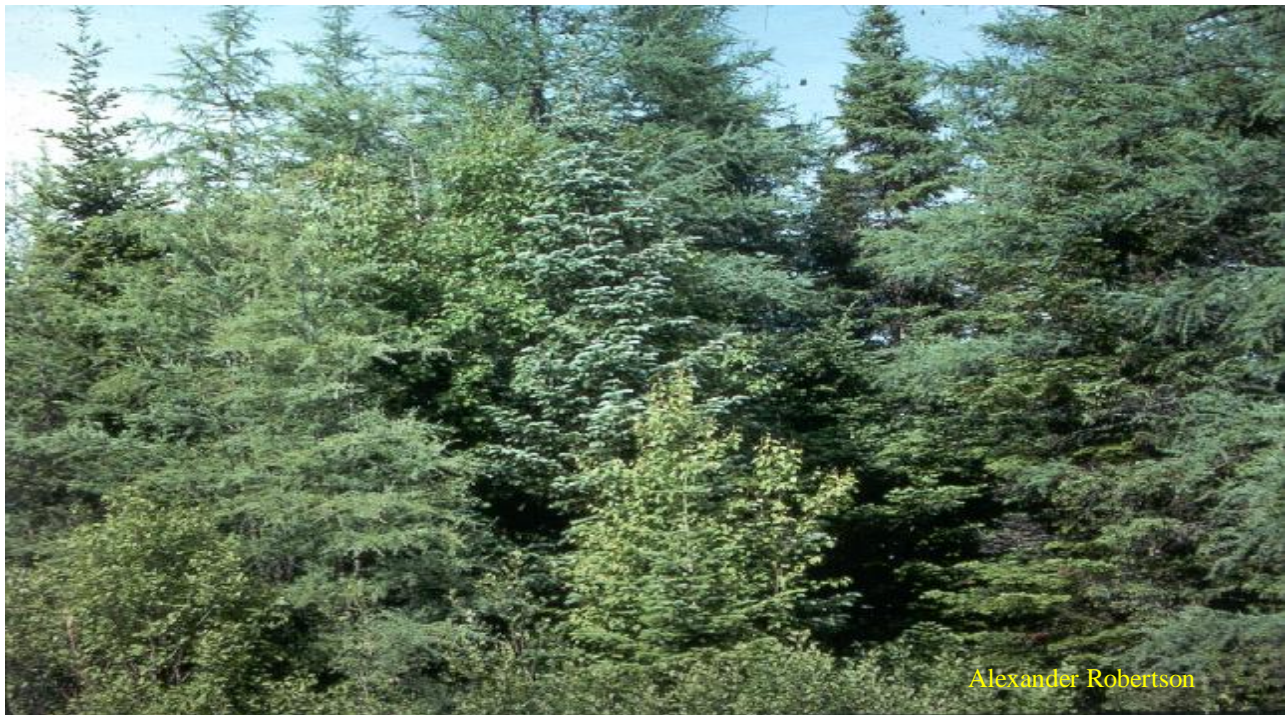
## THE BRACTED FIR

Alexander Robertson

Newfoundland gardeners make good use of their Native trees species: especially in windy, coastal locations where the salt laden air would be a challenge; especially if the common nursery stock one buys from local retailer. However, around coastal Newfoundland and southern Labrador native tree species are inured to the to windiness and some have unusual features that they may be of interest to gardeners in coastal Scotland.

For example, white spruce, makes a very fine hedge as well as a specimen tree. More and more we see black spruce, a relatively slow growing species, being planted or allowed to regenerate and grow naturally in low landscape schemes to simulate tuckamore (krummholz) for low shelter in parks and institutional developments. Balsam fir, as its name implies, has sweet aroma and a graceful tree – which is why it is one North America's favourite Christmas trees.

The bracted fir (*Abies x phanerolepis*) is an interesting and overlooked variant of the balsam fir for both ornamental. The bracted fir is a naturally occurring hybrid between Fraser fir (*Abies fraseri*) and balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*). It is most common in coastal areas of Newfoundland and southern Labrador. Of course, being a hybrid there are many variations in colour, form, and cone structure. Typically, it is most easily recognized by its bracted cones, although this is by no means always the case. Quite often new foliage on the tips of branches of bracted fir trees can have an exceptionally bright bluish-grey colour and sometimes a whitish colour somewhat like variants of blue spruce (*Picea pungens*). But, as its colloquial name implies, it is the beautiful, bracted cones of the bracted fir that really stand out. The photo below illustrates the toughness of the bracted balsam fir in being able to gracefully endure the strong salt- and ice-laden on-shore winds coming off the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Surely its wind resistance and aroma would make it both a colourful ornamental and worthy shelter tree and tall hedge for coastal Scotland.



A blue bracted balsam fir among the natural woods of coastal Newfoundland.





Variations in the foliage and cones of the bracted fir along coastal Newfoundland.

*Photos by Alexander Robertson.*





Alexander Robertson



*Left:* a few variations in cones of bracted balsam fir (top) grading to common Balsam fir (bottom) found in coastal areas of Newfoundland and southern Labrador.

*Right:* extremely bracted cones on weather beaten fir tuckamore (krummholz) at the Norse site in L'Ans aux Meadows National Historic Site.