



Norway Spruce Q&A

What is Norway Spruce?

Norway Spruce is a non-native species from Europe with tracked roots in America as early as 1860. It is the first new U.S.-grown, fully tested softwood species to be tested for strength values since lumber testing began in the 1920s.

Where is it grown?

The vast majority (upwards of 50%) of Norway Spruce is located throughout New York state, but it can also be found in Maine, down into New England, and as far west as Wisconsin.

Where/by whom will it be graded?

NELMA, the not-for-profit rules writing agency and steward of the lumber industry in the Northeast, has been overseeing the entire Norway Spruce testing process. Norway Spruce will be graded by NELMA-member mills throughout the growing region of the tree.

How did it get to the United States?

In the 1930s, FDR's Civilian Conservation Corps was called upon to reforest abandoned agricultural land throughout the northeast. Norway Spruce was one of several softwood species planted specifically for the purpose of soil stabilization. A 1936 Harvard study recorded evidence of the first Norway Spruce plantings at Woods Hole, Massachusetts, in 1860 by immigrants who brought stock from Europe.

What does it look like in the forest?

Norway Spruce has many specific traits which set it apart from other conifers, including easily identifiable large, drooping branches. In a plantation growth setting, Norway Spruce will naturally de-limb itself almost to the top of the tree.

What does it look like once cut into dimension lumber?

Once Norway Spruce has been harvested and processed into dimension lumber, it is virtually indistinguishable from white spruce. Even the most experienced of graders has not been able to discern one species from the other in log and lumber form.

What lumber grades can we expect from Norway Spruce?

Approximately 65% of Norway Spruce is graded at #2 and above, making it a very strong addition to the existing SPF's (spruce-pine-fir south) category.

What does the recent ALSC approval mean?

The ALSC approval allows Norway Spruce to join the nine other species in the SPFs grouping, which means that Norway Spruce may now be harvested and milled into dimension lumber and utilized in home construction and industrial applications.

How did this entire process begin?

In 2014, NELMA members began to ask in earnest about the procedures necessary to gain acceptance of the species for use as a resource to manufacture construction lumber. Recognizing this need, NELMA began the process of obtaining approval, followed by cutting and testing the lumber for its strength properties.

Who did the testing?

Testing was completed in partnership with the University of Maine's Advanced Structures and Composite Center.

How will Norway Spruce be used?

Norway Spruce is approved for use in home construction applications such as wall studs, floor and ceiling joists, and in various industrial applications.

What is the potential economic impact of Norway Spruce?

In areas where Norway Spruce is grown, harvested, and milled, the economic impact is present for job growth along the entire log and lumber chain of command. The introduction of Norway Spruce to lumber inventories across the growing region means increasing the availability of a locally grown, renewable, strong building product.

What is the future of Norway Spruce?

As odd as it sounds, the goal is for Norway Spruce to be folded into the SPFs category, and then simply disappear as a stand-alone species. Its impact will continue to be felt throughout the lumber industry for decades, but its similar look to existing spruce species means that once it joins the category, it becomes just another strong, renewable, locally grown wood species available to builders.

Tell us one super-cool fun fact about Norway Spruce!

The 2015 Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree (a 78-footer from Gardiner, NY) was a Norway Spruce, as it has been almost every year since the tradition began!

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