

START A NEW FOREST

There are good reasons to be starting a new forest even if we do defeat the beetles in this round of Humans vs. Insects. The healthiest forests have diversity not only of tree type but of age class. Our forest is mostly even aged ponderosas, with the majority of our trees about 100 years old. Trees have a natural life expectancy, like the rest of us. Encouraging a new generation of pine trees will provide a forest for the future.

There are several techniques for establishing the New Forest even as we fight to save the old one. Most of us would probably find that we have tiny pine seedlings coming up here and there, mostly there (meaning where we don't want them, such as in a flower bed or gravel driveway). Dig them up! Put them in little holes where you would want new trees to be, and water them. They grow surprisingly fast, which is to say several inches a year. I wouldn't start planning a tree house in one of them just yet.

Did you respond, "Water them?! With OUR water rates?" Aha, but there's an easy way to plant a forest for free, without water. The first step is to watch the squirrels. Toward the end of summer they start cutting and storing cones, and that is a sign that the cones are ripe. Pick up some cones or rob a squirrel's cache and put the cones in a paper bag. Set them aside in an outdoor shed or unheated garage and let them dry all winter. In the spring, rake up an area where you would like to grow trees. Shake the seeds out of the cones, plant them ½" deep in what passes for soil around here, and ignore them. Seedlings will appear and survive on their own. Later you can refine your "forest" by thinning or transplanting if you wish.

An even more passive way to start a forest is to select or create an area presently clear of pine trees but surrounded by them. Rough up the soil a bit, and let nature take its course. Pine trees want to grow in Pine Brook Hills.

Finally, the Colorado State Forest Service offers seedling trees at extremely reasonable rates. Visit their website at <http://csfs.colostate.edu>. The trees are sold in lots of 30 to 50 trees per species, and conifers range from 3" to 12" tall. Cam Peterson (see picture) has had good luck with his little forest of pines and firs.