

November EcoQuest: Junipers



Common Juniper (*Juniperus communis*), [willem9](#), some rights reserved, CC BY-NC.



Rocky Mountain Juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*), [greubel](#), some rights reserved, CC BY-NC.

As flowers lose their blooms and leaves fall, it might seem as if it's time to pause our botanically inspired exploring, but fortunately we have the mighty evergreens to keep us observing. One such evergreen are the beloved junipers. In the genus *Juniperus*, junipers are conifers (gymnosperms), and as such produce seed cones instead of flowers. There are two species of junipers along the Front Range – *Juniperus scopulorum* (Rocky Mountain juniper) and *Juniperus communis* (common juniper). Both produce round, bluish seed cones that are usually referred to as “berries.”

The two juniper species are easy to tell apart. *Juniperus communis* is a low-growing shrub with spreading branches, and spreading leaves, while *J. scopulorum* is an upright tree with appressed, scalelike leaves. Common juniper is found throughout forests and woodlands. Enjoy gin? Well, gin gets its distinctive flavor from common

juniper seed cones! In fact, the name gin is derived from the Dutch jenever, which means “juniper.” *Juniperus communis* even has the distinction of being the most widespread conifer in the world and is the only juniper species that occurs in both North America and Eurasia.

Rocky Mountain juniper is common in the foothills and is often found with Gambel oak or in rocky places. In fact, its scientific name translates to “juniper of rocky cliffs.” Rocky Mountain juniper is common throughout the western U.S.

Help Denver Botanic Gardens document the range of these junipers by photographing as many *Juniperus* as possible in the month of November. Remember to post only native or naturalized plants, not cultivated trees or shrubs. Post your findings to [iNaturalist](#) so they will be automatically added to the Denver EcoFlora Project.

What is an EcoQuest?

EcoQuests, part of the Denver EcoFlora project, challenge citizens to become citizen scientists and observe, study and conserve the native plants of the City via iNaturalist, an easy-to-use mobile app.

How Do I Get Started?

1. Download the iNaturalist app or register online at [iNaturalist.org](#).
2. Take photos of the plants in bloom that you find on your daily neighborhood walk. It is ok if they are weeds! But avoid taking photos of cultivated plants in gardens or in your home.
3. If you are concerned about revealing the location of sensitive organisms or observations at your own house, you can hide the exact location from the public by changing the “geoprivacy” of the observation to “obscured.”

4. Post your findings on iNaturalist via the app.
5. Your observations will automatically be added to the [Denver EcoFlora Project](#).
6. You can add an identification to your photo when you post your findings on iNaturalist, or leave it blank for others to identify.

What is the Goal?

The EcoFlora project is designed to meaningfully connect citizens with biodiversity, and to assemble novel observations and data on the metro area's flora to better inform policy decisions and conservation strategies.



Photo by Scott Dressel-Martin