

MONTERAY PINE

INTERESTING ARTICLE BY Dartmoor Tree Surgeons Ltd

Monterey Pines: Mountain Kings of the South West — Dartmoor Tree Surgeons Ltd

Monterey Pines (Latin: *Pinus radiata*) are indigenous to the Californian region of Monterey, which itself gets its name from the Spanish words “mountain” and “king”.

Like many coniferous trees they are relatively fast growing, reaching maturity within 30-40 years and commonly achieving heights of up to 40 metres (More & White, 2003, p. 253).

Once they are mature they have a characteristic domed shape with a profusion of deep green needles and often interesting, twisted limb formations. The trees have high numbers of fist-sized, sticky pinecones which are responsive to heat; in their native home, pine cones which had dropped to the forest floor would be opened by the heat of a forest fire, and the seeds would then be spread in the fire’s aftermath.

Like many American trees now at home within the UK, Monterey Pines first came to these shores with the famous botanist and explorer David Douglas, who amongst other introductions also brought us the Douglas Fir, which was named in his honour.

The Monterey Pine is particularly comfortable in the warm, coastal regions of the South West, growing even larger and faster than it does in its homeland, and several stands of these trees can be seen near or on our cliffs, particularly on the north coast.

In some countries, such as New Zealand, the Monterey Pine has become a very useful timber crop tree, although here in the UK you are much more likely to find a Monterey Pine gracing estate lands or forests. It was a particularly popular choice during the Victorian era for parks and estates, and now that many of these pieces of land have become more built upon it is not uncommon to have a Monterey Pine within a stone’s throw of residential homes, if not actually in a garden!

Monterey Pines are unfortunately very short lived, especially when compared to our native deciduous species. Like many fast-growing softwoods they do not last for a particularly long time, with most experts agreeing the 80 years is the average lifespan and that 100 years is the upper limit for a healthy tree.

Many of the Monterey Pines in Devon were planted at a similar time and are now coming to the end of their natural lives, which does help to explain why such a high number of these trees are coming to our attention this year. The Monterey Pines we have worked on are all of a similar age, and have been affected by a number of issues ranging from cauliflower fungus to *Phytophthora pluvialis*, which they have dealt with as well as having to combat the normal issues brought on by old age.

If you happen to have a large, mature Monterey Pine in your own garden don’t panic but do keep a weather eye on it, looking out for any changes in its foliage, such as discolouration, for fungi at the base of the tree, and especially for unexpected branch loss which is not directly caused by extreme weather and for dead wood in the crown of the tree itself.