

## 2013 December's *Guess that Plant*



*Pinus echinata* (top) and *Pinus rigida* (bottom)

### Our Common "Yellow" Pines of the Southern Coastal Plain

The December *Guess That Plant* was a view of two common pine species found on the southern part of New Jersey. *Pinus echinata*, the short-leaf pine (top photo), is a tall, straight tree with a set of cone and leaf characters that provide correct identifications: leaves in fascicles of 2 and 3, cones small, bark in large plates. *Pinus rigida*, Pitch pine, is our pine of the Pine Barrens and is often associated with extreme dry or fire prone areas. It is also found on the tops of New Jersey's highest mountains, in similar yet distinct ecological niches.

Often we are puzzled by a tree whose branches and leaves are 10, 20 and even 30 feet above our head making identification based on leaves impossible. In these instances it is nice to know you can use bark to make the correct species call. The short leaf pine has a bark that is split into large plates, often like leopard spots. On these plates are small dots and punctate holes. The holes are resin glands that were present in the growing tissue that is captured in the exfoliating bark. These holes are not regular in lines like those made by yellow bellied spa suckers or deep such as those made by exiting pine bark beetles. Pitch pine, on the other hand, has thick irregular patchy bark that is often edged with charcoal from the last fire. Its bark lacks the regular nature of short leaf and is most times thicker. This thickness is one of the adaptive features pitch pine has to regular fires that is not present on short leaf, making the later more susceptible to extreme forest.

The next time you are walking in a pine woods make sure you know which tree is the one next to you. It is easy enough if you know your bark.