

The Bristlecone Pine Tree

The once oldest living tree, named Methuselah, thought to be 4852 years old, has been moved to second place by a neighboring pine that is stated to be over 5000 years old! The exact location of both trees is a secret, but we do know that they live in a protected area called the Bristlecone Pine Forest. This preserve is located about 10,000 feet, in the White Mountains of California.



The conditions are rough. There is little soil and what soil exists is a mixture of rocky limestone and dolomite. The area gets 10-12 inches of rain a year – mostly in the form of snowflakes. The Bristlecone Pine has about 42 days during the year to store food for the long winter season. Home base for the Bristlecone Pines is rather extreme to sustain a tree for so many centuries. 5000 years ago, when these trees were seedlings, the stone age had just ended, and metal tools were the new rage in the mid-east. We have come a long way!



Scientists have studied Bristlecone Pines and try to solve questions like: *How can a tree live so long in such poor soil, and extreme weather conditions?* Some facts help with clues to this question.

These trees live at such an extreme altitude there is little competition for water and nutrients. The threat of fire is reduced because of the sparse ground cover and lack of needles. Bristlecone Pine needles stay on the tree for 30-40 years which doesn't allow needles accumulation to become a fire hazard.



The most amazing factor is that the tree goes dormant and shuts down during extreme periods of drought. When conditions change the tree wakes up and begins the business of photosynthesis, storing food, and adding growth.

Now that is one cool tree!

Ancient Bristlecone Tree Facts

- Female cones are dark purple, curves inwards and have bristles on the tips.
- Needles are clustered into groups of 5, cover the whole branch and remain on the tree for 40 years.