

# Terrestrial & Palustrine Plant Communities Of Pennsylvania

By Jean Fike

## Virginia pine - mixed hardwood forest

This community type most often occurs as a post-agricultural forest type on sand or silt loams, in the southeastern portion of the state. It may also occur on cleared and/or burned-over areas. *Pinus virginiana* (Virginia pine), sometimes with a mixture of other pines, e.g. *P. strobus* (eastern white pine), *P. rigida* (pitch pine), *P. pungens* (Table-Mountain pine), and less often *P. echinata* (short-leaf pine) or *P. resinosa* (red pine) contribute at least 25% of the overstory. Although this is typically a mixed type, some areas may be strongly dominated by pine. Hardwood associates vary; common species include *Quercus rubra* (red oak), *Q. velutina* (black oak), *Q. coccinea* (scarlet oak), *Q. alba* (white oak), *Prunus serotina* (wild black cherry), *Acer rubrum* (red maple), *Betula lenta* (sweet birch), *Carya* spp. (hickory), *Sassafras albidum* (sassafras), and *Fraxinus americana* (white ash). Shrubs include *Smilax* spp. (greenbrier), *Juniperus virginiana* (red-cedar), *Rhus copallina* (shining sumac), *Rubus allegheniensis* (Allegheny blackberry), *Toxicodendron radicans* (poison-ivy), and *Parthenocissus quinquefolia* (Virginia creeper). Due to the thick litter, the herbaceous layer is usually sparse, often with *Chimaphila maculata* (pipsissewa), *Pteridium aquilinum* (bracken fern), *Aralia nudicaulis* (wild sarsaparilla), *Gaultheria procumbens* (teaberry), *Desmodium* spp. (tick-trefoil), *Galium* spp. (cleavers), and various graminoids.

**Related types:** The "Virginia pine - mixed hardwood shale woodland" has an open canopy and is found on dry shale slopes. If the total conifer component is below 25%, consult the "Broadleaf terrestrial forest" section.

The "Serpentine Virginia pine - oak forest" differs from this type in ecology and species composition. The serpentine type occurs only on serpentinite-derived soils. *Q. stellata* (post oak) and *Q. marilandica* (blackjack oak), which are not characteristic of the more common type, are frequently found in the serpentine forest type. For a more detailed explanation of the ecology of serpentine barrens, see the description of the "Serpentine barrens complex."

**Range:** Piedmont, Ridge and Valley.

**Selected references:** Hunter and Swisher 1983, Eyre 1980.

[**Crosswalk:** Smith's "Xeric Central Hardwood - Conifer Forest," TNC's *Pinus virginiana* - *Quercus* (*alba*, *stellata*, *falcata*, *prinus*, *velutina*) Forest Alliance, SAF's Virginia pine-oak (78).]