Blue Spruce in western SD
*from John Ball, SDSU extension forestry specialist

*Although there are many planted throughout the area, Blue Spruce are not as drought tolerant as people would like, and John gets more pest samples from this species than almost all other species combined! A good alternate is a Black Hills or a Meyer spruce if you have your heart set on a spruce, but if you’re not too picky on the variety, the best evergreen for a long-term scenario is definitely a ponderosa pine.

*If you do choose to go with a spruce tree, keep in mind that you will need to water it heavily for most of its life, if you want to avoid having a dead tree in your yard. The water needs of the tree are generally determined by tree trunk caliper (width of the trunk). For seedlings less than 2 inches, experts advise watering once a day for two weeks, applying 1-2 gallons per inch of trunk caliper, and every other day from two weeks post planting, to two months post planting, applying 2-4 gallons per inch of trunk diameter, and weekly after that until well established (1-2 more growing seasons).

*Once established, they need 10-20 gallons of water/week. That is the equivalent of one inch of rain every week, which obviously we don’t see that kind of moisture here very often, so you will be watering spruce regularly even once they are an established tree in order to keep them alive.

*Here comes the tricky part – while these spruce have pretty hefty water needs, they also DO NOT tolerate flooding. Before you decide to plant, make sure the soil is well drained in the location you plan to plant, as a common problem is waterlogging the planting hole, which is as bad or worse as not meeting the trees water needs. You can check the soil (down to one inch), if it is dry all the way down, it’s a good idea to water, however if it is moist at all, hold off on watering until it dries out to avoid saturating the soil.

*As you can tell, blue spruce will take a lot of maintenance to keep them alive and well in our region. It certainly can be done, and this little factsheet is not intended to talk you out of planting this variety, however we want every tree that walks out of here with you to thrive! Knowing the requirements of the varieties you choose to plant beforehand, can greatly increase your odds of keeping your trees healthy and thriving!