

## Dwarf Conifers

Christmas focuses on beauty of evergreens and small conifers that can add year-round interest as specimens or accents. Most suburban lots can't accommodate many full sized conifers. As the traditional garden space gets smaller dwarf conifers adapt very well to a container.



What is the difference between a dwarf and a miniature conifer? "Dwarf" and "miniature" are relative terms in the conifer world, indicating a plant that grows smaller and more slowly than the species. The American Conifer Society classifies miniatures as evergreens that grow fewer than 3 inches annually and reach a size at 10 to 15 years of just 2 to 3 feet. Dwarfs grow 3 to 6 inches a year and in the same period grow to heights of 3 to 6 feet. Most top out at around 12 to 15 feet. In general dwarf and miniature evergreens are best planted in early October. Always pick the right plant for the right site. Think of dwarf conifers as anchors in mixed plantings. They change from season to season and you can find them in shades of green, blue and yellow.

• *Taxus cuspidata* or Dwarf English Yew 'Tauntonii' is 5-6' wide and 3-4' tall. These yews do well in either sun or shade and varied pH but it needs excellent drainage and protection from wind (see photo).

All yews are toxic in all parts if ingested, but don't result in contact rashes.

- *Taxus cuspidata* or Emerald Spread Japanese Yew 'Monloo' is 10' wide and 2.5' tall. It grows in full sun to light shade and has spreading green foliage. This is the ideal low maintenance choice for large scale ground cover and embankment plantings or low hedges. The species retains its dark green foliage color in the coldest of winters. Red berries appear in the winter.
- *Cephalotaxus harringtonia* or Japanese Plum Yew 'Duke Gardens' is a good shade yew and tolerates drought once plants are established.
- *Abies* (fir) trees should be planted in moist, well-drained, acid soil in full sun to light shade. *Abies koreana* 'Silver Mavers' and 'Green Carpet' are good dwarf specimens.
- *Cedrus* (cedar) does well in well-drained, slightly dry, sunny areas that are protected from the wind. *Cedrus deodora* 'Blue Snake' or 'White Imp' are attractive options.

- *Chamaecyparis* (false cypress) grows best in rich, moist soil in a non-windy area. *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Baldwin Variegated' and 'Nana' are nice selections. Be careful when handling false cypress and wear gloves, as some people can develop a skin irritation after contact.

Some other species include *Juniperus* (juniper) 'Blue Star', and *Picea* (spruce) *abies* 'Nidiformis' and 'Vermont Gold'. *Picea abies* 'Pusch' was the Collector's Conifer of the Year for 2008.

- *Pinus* (pine) grows well in sunny locations. A good variety is *pinus strobus* 'Blue Shag'.
- *Thuja* (arborvitae) has a few dwarf cultivars including *thuja occidentalis* 'Tiny Tim' and 'Tom Thumb'.

There are so many to choose from so it is important that you find a balance of evergreen and deciduous woody plants as well as herbaceous plants for the most effective landscape. WSU Spokane County Extension has a list of recommended plants for all conifers of various sizes.

You can find these species of dwarf and miniature evergreens at some of the following places:

Youngblood Wholesale Nursery in Salem, OR.

Stanley and Sons Nursery in Boring, OR (503) 663-4391.

Albers Vista Gardens in Kitsap, WA.

[Stanleynursery.com](http://Stanleynursery.com) in Port Angeles, WA (360) 457-8462

[MiniForest.com](http://MiniForest.com) in Mulino, OR (to actually go there you have to make an appointment at 503-632-3555). These people at MiniForest are dedicated to helping out model railroaders.

Cloud Mountain Farm in Everson, WA (360)966-0921.

[Nj.com/homegarden/garden/index.ssf/2008/12/tiny\\_trees.html](http://Nj.com/homegarden/garden/index.ssf/2008/12/tiny_trees.html) (for a list of resources).

The American Conifer Society has a newsletter and a Conifer Quarterly. In addition you can download an order form.

## References

[www.youngbloodnursery.com](http://www.youngbloodnursery.com) (10/21/10)

[www.cloudmountainfarm.com](http://www.cloudmountainfarm.com) (9/22/10)

[www.iseli-nursery.com/articles/PatioGardens2006.htm](http://www.iseli-nursery.com/articles/PatioGardens2006.htm) (9/22/10)

[landscaping.about.com/od/evergreenshrubsbushes1/a/japanese\\_yews.htm](http://landscaping.about.com/od/evergreenshrubsbushes1/a/japanese_yews.htm) (9/24/10)

[www.stanleyandsons.com](http://www.stanleyandsons.com) (9/13/10)

[www.conifersociety.org](http://www.conifersociety.org) (9/11/10)

[www.monrovia.com/plant-catalog/plants.php](http://www.monrovia.com/plant-catalog/plants.php) (9/24/10)

[www.nj.com/homegarden/garden/index.ssf/2008/12/tiny\\_trees.html](http://www.nj.com/homegarden/garden/index.ssf/2008/12/tiny_trees.html) (10/20/10)

[mastergardener@spokanecounty.org](mailto:mastergardener@spokanecounty.org) (9/24/10)

[monroe.extension.psu.edu](http://monroe.extension.psu.edu) (9/25/10)