

POST GARDENS

## Compact plants for downsized gardens

### DWARF CONIFERS

BY LORRAINE FLANIGAN

Gardening trends indicate smaller lots and fast-paced lifestyles *have* led to a desire for easy-care, compact plants. No group seems more fitting for these needs than dwarf conifers. Slow-growing and more diminutive than their parents, these shrubs and small trees fit into any landscape and, once established, are relatively trouble-free.

Jim Lounsbury of Vineland Nurseries in Beamsville, Ont, has a selection of some of the best, rarest dwarf conifers in Canada. He offers these recommendations;

**Rock gardens** A dwarf conifer that can take shade but also performs well in a sunny rockery, *Abies balsamea* 'Nana\*' (balsam fir), looks like a tiny nest spruce, but grows at a much slower pace, reaching a height and spread of 60x90 centimetres in about 20 years. It prefers well-drained soil and will decline rapidly in moist soils.

**Groundcovers** He recommends a dwarf version of the classic evergreen groundcover, the creeping juniper. *Juniperus horizontalis*

'Monber' (icee blue) grows to only 10 cm high but spreads up to 2.5 metres. During the first cold snap, its handsome silvery blue foliage assumes a purple hue. Equally suitable is 'Lime Glow,' a creeping juniper with golden foliage that turns a burnished copper in fall. **Mixed with perennials** Only a taller dwarf conifer has the stature to compete in a border filled with perennials. Mr. Lounsbury recommends *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Nana Gracilis' (Hinoki false cypress). This upright conifer grows

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### IRRESISTIBLE WITH ITS SOFT FOLIAGE

to a 1.5-m-tall irregular pyramid of swirling deep green foliage. 'Nana Aurea,' a cousin, is a bit shorter and has golden foliage that turns deep bronze in winter.

**Focal point** A knock-out with its bright red cones, *Picea abies* 'Acrocona' (dwarf Norway spruce) is a hands-down favourite. No two grow alike; each forms a unique, undulating mound that slowly grows to 1 m tall by 3 m wide.

**Eye-popping colour** No conifer

gets more notice than the bright golden *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Nana Aurea', (dwarf Hinoki false cypress). The bright yellow foliage turns slightly bronze in winter; on a sheltered site, it remains golden. Another favourite from the same family is the 'Nana Lutea,' which glows with lemony gold foliage. **Touchable texture** *Thuja occidentalis* 'Teddy' is an irresistible dwarf conifer. It is as huggable as a teddy bear, Mr. Lounsbury says. This dwarf white cedar forms a small mound of soft green foliage that turns a rich plum in winter.

**Trough garden** Many dwarf conifers lend themselves to the scale of these container rock gardens. Mr. Lounsbury likes *Chamaecyparis picifera* 'Tsukumo' (Sawara false cypress), a bun-shaped conifer that slowly grows to 45 cm; and *Juniperus communis* 'Berkshire,' a compact mound only 30 cm high.

**Shade garden** Hemlocks are noted for tolerance to shade. One of the best dwarf forms is *Tsuga Canadensis* 'Jeddeloh' It makes a low-spreading nest of soft, feathery needles suggesting its common name, bird's nest hemlock.

**Formal garden** The formal landscape of a stately townhouse is the perfect site for *Larix decidua pendula*, (weeping European larch). The gracefully arching branches of this deciduous conifer are coloured with orange-yellow needles in fall, and are laid bare in winter.

For more information call Vineland Nurseries, 905-562-4836.

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