

No beating the utility of bushes

Shrubs and small trees enhance the garden in every season

By **ROBERT HOWARD**
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A massive Norway spruce was growing in the back of the garden when we bought our house more than 20 years ago. It was magnificent, but at about 15 metres (around 45 feet) tall, it was vastly out of scale for a small city lot. It drooped right to the ground and over two consecutive summer droughts, it developed a disease that caused whole branches to die off.

That now-gone spruce, along with hundreds of its oversized family across Hamilton and probably every other urban area, is an example of how *not* to use shrubs and trees in the garden. A 15-metre Norway spruce rarely belongs on a 30 by 100 city property.

But over the past few years, as I have visited gardens and seen some truly great ones, I have seen the common denominator: The use of shrubs and small trees in the garden, not just around the edges, but in flower borders and beds.

A garden without shrubs and trees is like a living room without-trim or moulding, with no accessories or art on the walls. The furniture may be lovely, but the space around it seems lacking.

There's much more to shrubs and trees in the garden than a massive mound of forsythia at a front corner of the house or ancient "foundation plantings" of neglected junipers. A carefully selected variety of shrubs will provide colour, from flowers, foliage or both, in every season. They also provide dramatic shapes, textures and forms that enhance a garden from summer to snow and back again.

When you talk shrubs and tree among garden aficionados, the name of Jim Lounsbery inevitably comes up.

Lounsbery, a former superintendent of the Royal Botanical Gardens' Arboretum, is owner of Vineland Nurseries, a small operation with a big reputation for rare and unusual shrubs and trees. He began it about 23 years ago as a part-time operation to fuel his own interest and hobby, and has been at it full-time for five or six years.

Lounsbery sell trees and shrubs in deciduous and evergreen varieties, as well as rhododendrons, perennials, vines and groundcovers.

"I don't sell annuals, I don't sell fruit trees and I don't sell rose bushes," he says.

His passion and greatest interest is in evergreens, particularly the dwarf varieties that are particularly popular for plantings around ponds, waterfalls and rock gardens.

Some are as small as a baseball, and yet are perfectly formed, much like a natural bonsai. "Dwarf" conifers, in his terms, are those that get up to about a metre high, although most are much smaller. All are very slow-grow-

Among the most distinctive of the conifer shrubs is Hinoki False Cypress, which comes in forms so dwarf they're virtually tiny — "They'll grow a quarter to a half an inch a year," Lounsbery says — up to larger ones that will grow eventually to several metres. What they have in common is a wonderful shape that is almost like the rolls around the face of a Shar-Pei dog. The wavy surface of the shrub creates a look of shimmering variegation that catches and holds the eye.

The dwarf conifers, Lounsbery says, are remarkably hardy, since they tend to grow below the wind that dries out larger shrubs. The dwarf balsam fir, for example, is a "really tough nut," he says. "It'll survive almost anything."



SCOTT GARDNER, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR .

Behold the hardy and versatile dwarf common juniper a specialty at Vineland Nurseries.



The Hinoki Cypress, at left, is a particularly lush, textured conifer. *Abies lasiocarpa* 'Arizonica,' centre, is a sub-alpine fir tree. A close up of the *Arizonica*, right, shows new cone growth.