

Small plants for small areas

Dwarf conifers and other unusual plant materials have become popular among homeowners in the last few years.

Dwarf evergreens remain small as they mature so they are ideal for people who want smaller plants for smaller areas, says Horticulturist Jim Lounsbery of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food's Horticultural Research Institute of Ontario, Vineland.

Some slow growing evergreens to try include *Picea abies* 'Pumiha', a round, flattened globe spruce; the *Picea abies* 'Nidiformis', a nest spruce. Both take many years to reach a .62 centimetre (two foot) width.

Another slow growing plant, *Pinus strobus* 'nana', a dwarf white pine, can also be considered a dwarf because it takes about 50 to 80 years before it grows to full size. Most juniper and spruce varieties are also quite hardy.

Other dwarfs exist within several species of *Chamaecyparis*, such as *obtusa*, *pisifera* and *lawsoniana* species. A green variety of *obtusa* may grow well in a Toronto climate, but a golden form may burn, even in the Niagara Peninsula's sheltered environment.

Some varieties of *Chamaecyparis lawso-*

niana also seem hardy but others burn readily so wind protection is advisable, Lounsbery says.

Another evergreen, *Cedrus*, or the true cedar, is being grown in warmer plant zones of Ontario but it is advisable to provide good wind protection for this variety. Choose more prostrate varieties and start out with less expensive smaller plants.

Other plants now becoming regulars on the market are rhododendrons, *pietris*, *leucothoe* and a large assortment of Japanese maple varieties.

Lounsbery says rhododendrons and *pietris* are fairly easy to grow if plant hardiness ratings and soil acidity recommendations are followed.

Most Japanese maples will also grow well if they are planted in a slightly protected area. But *leucothoe* and *kalmia* are tender and should be treated like a rhododendron.

Hollies, until recently, could be planted only in limited areas. Since the introduction of the hardy blue holly (*Ilex meserveae*), the area for growing hollies has expanded immensely, Lounsbery says.

There are many other plant materials available to the homeowner but be sure to choose a plant that is hardy to your area.