

# Conifer Quarterly

Vol. 28 No. 2

Spring 2011



*Picea omorika* 'Bruns'

Photo by Don Wild



*Abies veitchii* Spring Cones  
Photo by Don Wild

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The *Conifer Quarterly* is the publication of the American Conifer Society

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*The purposes of the American Conifer Society are the development, conservation, and propagation of conifers, with an emphasis on those that are dwarf or unusual, standardization of nomenclature, and education of the public.*

# Conifer Quarterly

Spring 2011  
Volume 28, No 2

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You are invited to join our Society. Please address membership and other inquiries to the American Conifer Society National Office, 175 Charisma Lane, Lewisville, NC 27023-9611. Membership: US \$30 (indiv.), \$35 (joint), \$30 (institutional), \$50 (sustaining), \$100 (corporate business) and \$130 (patron). If you are moving, please notify the National Office 4 weeks in advance.

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Thank you for your participation in this marvelous society. At the ACS Board Meeting this past February a hot topic for discussion was Reference Gardens. The Southeast Region in particular has been active in recruiting Reference Gardens with 12 to date. The Board granted the SE Region an extra \$3,000 for their Reference Gardens in 2011. I want flagship gardens such as the U.S. National Arboretum's Goteli Collection, the Bickelhaupt Arboretum and The Dawes Arboretum to be Reference Gardens as well. Please contact your regional leaders if you know of a public garden that should be an ACS Reference Garden.

Compliance with new IRS guidelines for not-for-profit organizations was another important topic at our board meeting. It is necessary that our membership be made aware through articles written for the *Conifer Quarterly* of progress made by individuals and gardens that receive ACS funds. Furthermore, we want to know what conifers you are planting, and which ones do best in your specific landscape situations. My goal is to compile lists of ACS "Blue Ribbon" conifers for every landscape purpose and for every part of the world where our members reside. These highly recommended conifers should be on display at our Reference Gardens.

We owe the public information about these marvelous low-maintenance, high-impact plants that can be purchased to improve landscapes and people's quality of life. Appropriate articles regarding these conifers and the functions of the ACS are to be published in the *Conifer Quarterly*, on the ACS website and in other media so as to reach a wider audience.

Please check out the Conifer Data-

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

base as Bill Barger has updated it so you can sign in, contribute information and even keep records on the conifers you grow at home. There is a separate sign-in for the ACS website and please note that if you submit news or an article it should be in rich text format (RTF) for ease of posting. Perhaps you will enjoy reading the new Central Region newsletter that Jerry Belanger has edited. An expanded version with more images and articles is posted on our website and has been sent to Central Region members who have provided their e-mail addresses to John Martin at the National Office.

Gee Farms in Michigan, who will help host the 2012 ACS National Meeting, has volunteered to donate plants to the Secrest Arboretum in Ohio that was devastated by a tornado last September, as have our friends at Rich's Foxwillow Pines in Illinois. Thank you Gary, Kaye, Kary, Rich and Susan for your generosity!

We need to recruit new members. Volunteers who are willing to reach out to people by making public presentations or put on an ACS Rendezvous to recruit and retain members are welcome. Feel free to contact a board member or someone who has done these sorts of things before if you can help. I am organizing my first Rendezvous in Northeast Ohio on Friday July 8th where a good friend and neighbor of The Holden Arboretum will open her fabulous private garden featuring conifers and companion plants in the morning. Bill Hendricks has volunteered to help with tours and host our group for lunch and a tour of Klyn Nurseries in the afternoon. Send me a note or give a call if you are interested in attending.

Major ACS events planned for this year include the Central Region Meeting

in Ames, Iowa on June 17-18 where Gary Whittenbaugh has organized what promises to be an inspiring get-together. The National Meeting in spectacular Silverton, Oregon, August 4-6, organized by Brian Jacob, is not to be missed. It will be followed by a 4-day post-tour of scenic Oregon organized by Brian Jacob, Kathleen Pottratz and Joe Carli. The Northeast Region Meeting in beautiful Burlington, Vermont, September 9-10, organized by Ridge Goodwin is certainly compelling. Lastly, the Southeast Region Meeting in gorgeous Athens, Georgia, October 21-23, organized by Flo Chaffin, will be dynamic.

Rich Larson has received his first conifer registrations this year. If you have developed new conifers or wish to promote conifers that have not been formally registered with the International Registration Authority at the Royal Horticultural Society, Wisley, please contact Rich at The Dawes Arboretum.

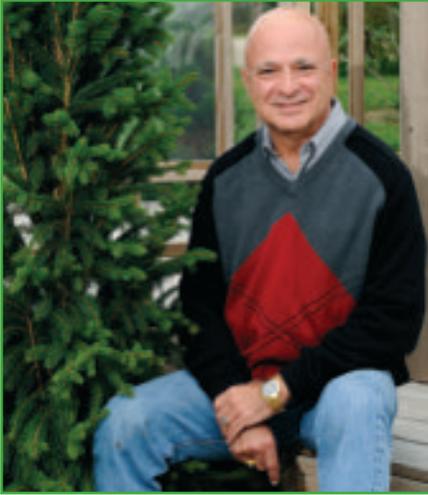
One way to develop new conifers is to grow them from seed. Please consider participating in the ACS Seed Exchange this year that Jim Brackman has volunteered to coordinate. I will collect more seed this year starting with the cedar of Lebanon, the cones of which have begun to shatter now that winter is giving way to spring.

Those who wish to apply for the Jean Iseli Memorial Grant this year may submit an application to me by May 6, 2011. Paul Halladin and Bill Thomas have once again volunteered to serve on the committee. Inquiries are welcome.

Faithfully yours,



## EDITOR'S MEMO



Spring is here. The days have been getting progressively longer. In some areas, the first signs of spring have already begun to poke their heads through the ground. Buds are swelling. Conifers have been flush with color. The snows have receded. This *Quarterly* is itself abundant with new colors and perspectives. Spring is the time to rejoice, but sometimes it is also a time to discover what we have lost in winter's snows.

We all mourn the passing of Dick van Hoey Smith. His lifelong work has benefited us all and he will forever be remembered. His curation of his family's arboretum in The Netherlands and the many lives and trees he has touched are a fitting memorial. Chub Harper is also remembered in this issue. The Board of the American Conifer Society at its winter meeting named the Award of Merit for Development in the Field of Conifers in honor of Justin C. "Chub" Harper. Like Dick, Chub remains in the hearts and minds of all coniferites through his

legacy.

For those who attended the National Meeting in Charlotte this past summer, the name Jörg Kohout has a special meaning. His adventures in search of witch's brooms astounded us all. This time, in an English translation, we can follow his trip into the Altai Mountains in south central Siberia in search of even more witch's brooms. I am certain you will enjoy the photography and the story. Even the living conditions on the expedition should be a real eye-opener.

In this issue you will also read about conifers outside their zones. Don Durkee from Bandon, Oregon has written about conifers thriving and growing in his garden which lies to the southwest of Portland. *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*, *Cupressus duclouxiana*, *Pseudotsuga menziesii* and others are learning to love the lush environment of the sea breezes of Oregon. In the Editor's Corner, you will also read about conifers living "outside their zone". I have been attempting to raise conifers non-native to my Zone 5, some of which are indoors for the winter. This is the first report on successes and failures of my experiment.

Along a similar vein, Tom Cox brings us with him through the South to visit different locales and botanical centers where conifers are thriving despite their zonal parameters. Tom calls us to think of *new* places, which are not new at all, where conifers thrive and grow. In the first part of others to come, Tom brings us to the conifers of several locations in Coral Gables, Orlando and Gainesville, Florida and then Tifton, Georgia. Soon we will be hearing of conifers from south-

BY RON ELARDO

west Pacific nations and regions, along with the Caribbean, the Azores and Africa growing in our own southern United States and maybe even in my plant room.

Don Wild has provided the *Quarterly* beautiful pictures of cones and *flowers* in spring for this issue. I know you will agree that they are breathtaking. There is a simplicity and a colorful panorama that speaks to the wonder of the cones which *our* conifers provide when warm weather beckons forth their reproductive powers.

One interesting and novel article highlights the American Conifer Society's Reference Garden Program. Barbie Colvin and Monya Barnes, the graphic designer of the *Conifer Quarterly*, have teamed up to depict the route money takes from plant auctions at regional and national meetings to support Reference Gardens. In addition, the silent and live auctions offer plants that eventually grace personal and public gardens.

Flo Chaffin describes the nuts and bolts of the Reference Garden program in *Reference Gardens 101*. She offers the blueprint for those interested in furthering the ACS's educational outreach mission through Reference Gardens. If you want to know how to start a Reference Garden, be sure to read all about it in Flo's article.

Keep the beginning of August (the 4th through the 6th) in your planner for the National Meeting in Oregon at the Oregon Garden. Also from our Western Region comes Jack Ayers' report on garden sculptures at the home of Willis and Marion Johnson. Willis has created in Roseburg, Oregon, in view of the Cascade Mountains, a whimsical and mythical realm of dragons, griffons, frogs and

prehistoric plants, tucked in conifer and flower beds. Speaking of artistic creation, check out the process of making your own troughs for miniature conifer planting.

Michael Larkin shares his thoughts on making your own trough gardens. Not only will you learn the formula for making hypertufa planters, but Michael also gives you the lowdown on planting medium, plant selection, creating the micro landscape in the container and then maintaining it. Michael promises to be in Oregon in August to plan more trough gardens with conifers. But before that Oregon Meeting, the Central Region will hold its annual meeting in Ames, Iowa from June 17th through the 18th of June. Come join us in Ames where you will have the chance to visit some fantastic gardens.

Also, come October 21–23, plan to travel to the Southeastern Region for their annual regional meeting which will take place in Athens, Georgia. Flo Chaffin reports on one of the places registrants will visit when in Georgia. Dr. Sam Jones and his wife Carleen will greet ACS members at Piccadilly Farm. All kinds of plants and venues will greet you there at Piccadilly. I suspect some of those conifers may very well be traveling up north for their own kind of special venue.

The Spring *Quarterly* affords you an array of articles and information. Enjoy this issue and get those beds ready. Spring is in the air and that can only mean one thing. It's planting time.



# Expedition into the Altai Mountains

Text by Jörg Kohout Translated by Dr. Ronald J. Elardo

Photos by Jörg Kohout and members of the team

**Expedition into the Altai Mountains, 4,000 miles southeast of Moscow, 50 miles north of the Mongolian border, from the 20th to the 31st of August 2010.**

**10** years ago a small group of two men began expeditions to search for unusual conifers and witch's brooms. Since then we have traversed the mountains of China, the United States, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, Greece, Spain, Macedonia, Russia and Canada.

This year we became a 4-man team: my brother-in-law, his brother, a friend from the Czech Republic and me. On the afternoon of the 20th of August we departed for Moscow, Jens and Jörg Graeser, Wazlaw from the Czech Republic and I, in order to catch an evening

flight to Barnaul. Since we were flying to the east, the night would be short because of time zones. We arrived in Barnaul at 5:15 in the morning. We were ripped from our sleep by the plane making extreme braking maneuvers. It seemed that the runway was too short. It took all the pilot had to stop the plane. You could see the utter terror written on the faces of all the passengers. Even though we had not had much sleep, we were completely wide awake from the experience.

From Barnaul we took a taxi and arrived in Gorna-Altaiisk by way of Binsk. The trip took 3 1/2 hours and we gradually saw the foothills of the Altai Mountains. The mountains rise up from the plains as one nears Kazakstan. The climate in this region is very much like that of the Russian Steppe, extreme cold in the winter and very cold nights in the



Teletskoje Ozero in the Altai Mountains



*Abies sibirica* Witch's broom

summer.

In order to reference the area in which we were traveling, we were around 220 miles from Novosibirsk in southeastern Siberia. In this region one finds *Picea obovata*, *Abies sibirica* and *Pinus sibirica*. In the higher and wetter altitudes grows *Larix sibirica*.

In Gorno-Altai our journey into the Altai Mountains began far from cities and villages. Provisions had to be gotten in the supermarket while fresh vegetables were purchased at the open air market. A couple of locals registered us at the post office in Gorno-Altai. Foreigners are

required to report to the local authorities in Russia. When one travels without hotel accommodations, registration as a foreigner must be done at the local post office.

By now our party had grown to 8 people: we 4, a translator (who had come from over 100 miles away), a guide to cook our meals, a botanist and our driver. A Russian-made "Uwas", a typically uncomfortable minivan, brought us to the first stop on our journey, a tourist village of wooden houses and a small restaurant. After being in 90 degree heat all day, we experienced our first star filled night, some 2,500 feet above sea level between Gorno-Altai and Lake Teletsko. Night in the Altai Mountains is very cold with temperatures close to freezing. We were thankful to be sleeping in the wooden houses in the village.

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A Russian-made "Uwas," a typically uncomfortable minivan, brought us to the first stop on our journey

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Our transportation, the Uwas



River Bia

On the next morning we set out in the direction of the lake. After around 2 hours we reached a large bridge over the River Bia. A small open air market lay on the opposite bank. There we were able to buy more provisions before we left the beaten path and headed out over rocky terrain. The mountains were looming higher than ever. We endured some rough hours of

travel on the way to Lake Teletsko, but we discovered our first witch's broom.

Along the river we took a break to rest. We started a fire and considered how we would brew the tea we had with river water. With a bit of trepidation we had our first taste of black tea. The ice cold water was very clean and no one had any ill effects from it. Then we continued our



Jörg Kohout holding *Abies sibirica*  
Witch's broom

The ice cold (river) water was very clean and no one had any ill effects from it



Preparing a meal



Siberian apples, small and sour

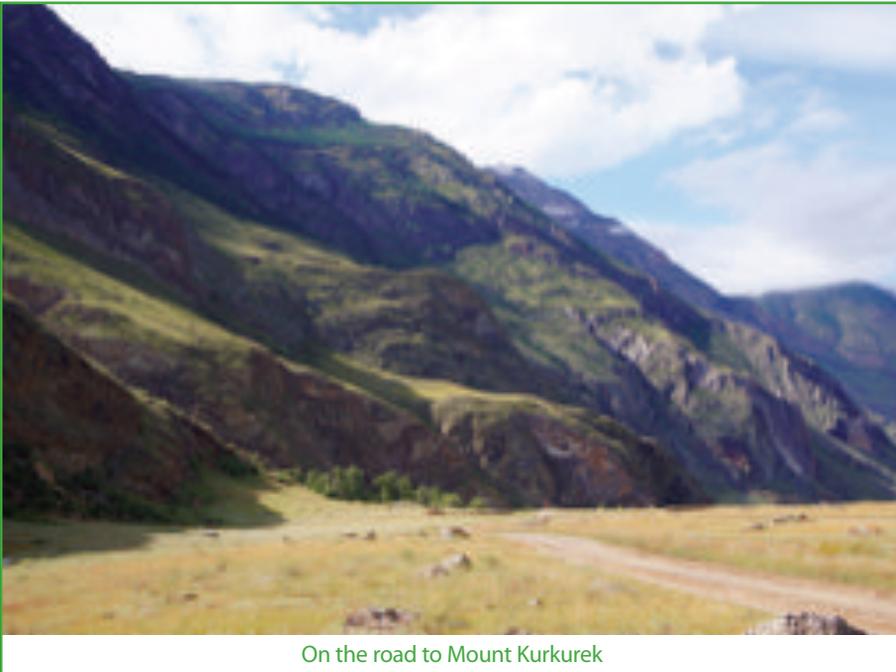
journey to the lake. Along the way we found two more witch's brooms from *Abies sibirica*, which were growing south of Lake Teletsko. Above the lake *Abies* no longer grow.

In order to enter the National Park we had to pass through a gate and register with a forestry official. Few tourists ever come here even though the lake is over 60

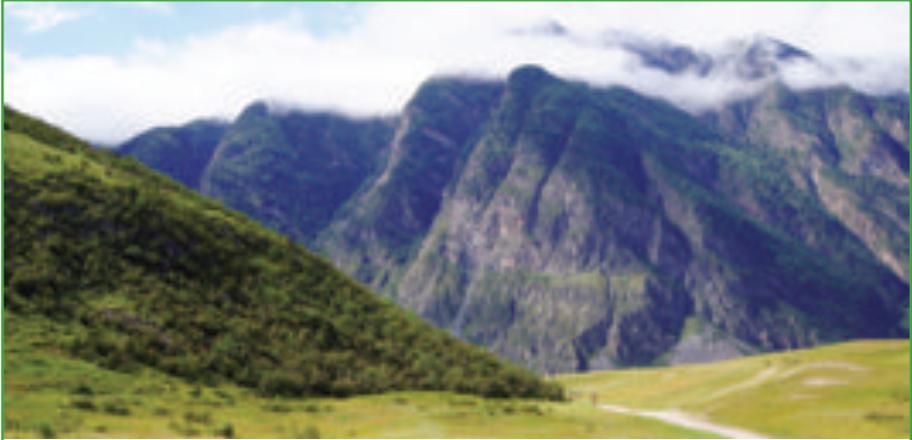
miles wide and is the second largest fresh water lake in Russia. We were astounded when we arrived in a small village at the lake. There was only one small house that offered lodgings for tourists. There was no running water in the homes. Any water had to be brought into the house by bucket from the lake. Also, there is only limited electrical service to the homes. During the day a generator could be heard which supplied electricity to the village. In the evening it would be shut off. Our flashlights really came in handy.

### The seventy year old apple trees are an anomaly in Siberia.

On the next day we had to wait until the lake's waters were less choppy. We were not able to set out with our two speedboats which were to take us northward across the lake. We used the time to



On the road to Mount Kurkurek



Mount Kurkurek

visit the village's orchards. The seventy year old apple trees are an anomaly in Siberia. The special microclimate of the little village makes it possible for the trees to flourish despite the cold of Siberia. The fruit is for the most part small and rather sour. Even so, it is truly a wonder since the orchard here is the only one of its kind in Siberia.



*Abies sibirica*

### There are no roads or paths to get to the other side of the lake

By the next afternoon the lake had become more navigable and we set out with the boats. Simultaneously, it was time for us to bid farewell to our first guide and our driver. There are no roads or paths to get to the other side of the lake where there is a tourist camp with small wooden bungalows and a small restaurant. Electricity is produced there on a daily basis by a generator too. In the evening we had a good time with several of the locals. There was good music and dancing. That night the generator was left on an extra hour just for us.

During the evening it began to rain.

In spite of that, we enjoyed the evening right up to the end. In the morning the rain subsided somewhat, but it was very cold with overcast skies. There was a little concern about the weather over the next several days, but we decided to push on for the next twelve hours in order to reach the 12,000 foot Mount Kurkurek, which is part of a small mountain chain, called Chrebet. After an hour of travel the weather improved, the clouds separated and the sun came out. The beauty of the

### We decided to push on for the next 12 hours to reach the 12,000 foot Mount Kurkurek

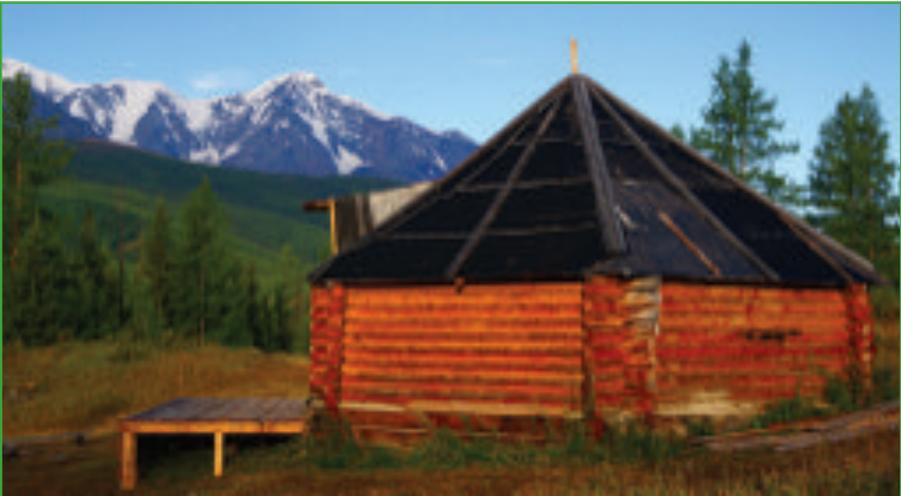


*Picea obovata* witch's broom

landscape was breathtaking and the air was crystal clear.

Day's end was upon us as we reached the city of Aktasch after a physically exhaustive drive. From that point on we had the luxury of paved roads. Our driver, who had brought us the entire

eight hours through the Altai, could not take us any further because he had no driver's license. Once again we had to transfer vehicles. After more than four hours we reached our accommodations for the night. It was 1:30 a.m. when we arrived. In the moonlight we could see the



Our yurt



Inside our yurt

snow capped peaks of Kurkurek. We were totally exhausted. Even so, the last twelve hours of our journey were filled with experiences and impressions of this fascinating landscape. We had found our first witch's broom from a *Picea obovata*.

For the next two nights our yurt would be our main lodging. There was nobody else around other than us and our attendant.

For the next two nights our yurt would be our main lodging. There was nobody else around other than us and our attendant.

### Submitting photography to *Conifer Quarterly*:

Please keep in mind that you must have your camera set to the highest possible resolution when capturing your images/photos to be submitted to *Conifer Quarterly*. This means you will be able to take fewer images when your camera is set to take high resolution photos.

An average sized photo should be around 3-5MB (megabytes). We can always take larger files and reduce them, but not the other way around, without loss of data.

### Don't miss your *Conifer Quarterly*!

Contact the Society with your new address.

John Martin

American Conifer Society

175 Charisma Lane

Lewisville, NC 27023-9611

## **“De eik is geveld.” “The oak has been felled.”**

**J. R. P. van Hoey Smith**

Text and Photo by Don Wild



J. R. P. “Dick” van Hoey Smith  
September 29, 1921 to December 21, 2010  
and his wife Riet

**O**n December 21, 2010, we lost a wonderful man, Dick van Hoey Smith. Dick lived with his wife, Riet, curating the grounds of the family estate which is now the Trompenberg Arboretum in Rotterdam.

I had the opportunity to become acquainted with Dick and his family through the American Conifer Society beginning in the year 2000 while on tour in Holland and Germany. Dick’s no nonsense approach to the plant world was evident from the moment I met him. Several years later, when traveling with his wife and their two daughters, Maaïke and Joan, I had the chance to appreciate the more sensitive aspect of Dick. His caring nature was evident last summer after destructive storms whirled across central Holland. Dick, in spite of his ailing health, called and offered his

assistance to the area plantsmen he admired so much.

His accomplishments have been monumental not only in the world of conifers, but also in succulents, rhododendrons, hollies, oaks, beeches and maples. His favorite sayings include: “If you want something done, give it to a busy person.” And, “If you want to keep a plant, give it away.” He considered his wife, Riet, his greatest discovery.

Dick’s interest and expertise in plants began as a small child when he earned a penny for indentifying plants correctly. Dick subsequently curated the Rotterdam family estate into the world famous Trompenberg Arboretum. Dick was awarded the Silver Doorenbos Medal in 1981 by the Dutch Dendrology Society. He was recognized in 1983 by the International Dendrology Society and awarded the Veitch Memorial Award by the Royal Horticultural Society.

Dick either authored or co-authored a total of 9 books. The most familiar of these is his 1996 publication of *Conifers: the Illustrated Encyclopedia*, which continues to be the best illustration of the extensive variety of conifers available to the avid gardener. Most of the pictures in this text came from Dick’s collection of over 60,000 slides.

Something interesting to note about Dick is that he was an avid supporter of the ACS and the *Conifer Quarterly*, composing handwritten articles and mailing them via the postal service.

When Dick received the ACS Award of Merit, he quoted Martin Luther in his acceptance speech: "If I know I will die tomorrow, today I will plant a tree."

The entire membership of the American Conifer Society wishes to extend our condolences to his wife Riet, his son Wim, his daughters Maaïke and Joan, and their families.

To read more of Dick's accomplishments, refer to the Fall 2004 CQ, Vol. 21, No. 4 and the Spring 2005 CQ, Vol. 22, No. 2.



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The 2011 Application Form and Eligibility Form may be downloaded from the Conifer Society Website after January 1st, 2011. It may also be obtained by mail and e-mail using the contact information below. Please use "ACS Application and Eligibility" as the subject if you choose email. ACS Scholarship Committee, Gerald Kral, 900 Winton Rd., N Rochester, NY 14609  
Email: [gkral1@rochester.rr.com](mailto:gkral1@rochester.rr.com)

# Conifers Outside Their Zone in Oregon

by Don Durkee

Ten years ago I moved onto five acres of woodland near the town of Bandon, on the south coast of Oregon. After clearing three acres, I decided to collect conifers, focusing on what would be medium to large size trees, as well as varieties uncommon or rare in this area. Though I can often hear the surf breaking about a mile away, I am surrounded by mature *Pseudotsuga menziesii* (Douglas fir) and *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* (Port Orford cedar), which protect my property from some of the severe winds coming off the ocean.

Of the two hundred trees I have planted, the fastest growing by far is *Cupressus duclouxiana* (Yunnan cypress), which is listed as endangered, probably due to habitat destruction in its native range. The tree measured 31" in height when I planted it in May 2009; it measured 72" by December 2010, a growth of 41" in just nineteen months! It is a beautiful gray-green with limbs that drape slightly, and glisten, especially after a rain shower. I have not been able to find out much about this tree, but I feel that it will be of interest to collectors.

Although I do not pay much attention to climate-zone recommendations, I was a little hesitant to buy a Mexican weeping pine, *Pinus patula*, in May 2009, since its native range is subtropical, the Mexican states of Vera Cruz, Oaxaca, and Chiapas. Although we have mild climate compared to the rest of Oregon we get the majority of our rain between November and May, no one confuses our climate with that of southern Mexico. But I found *patula* too

pretty to pass up. That first winter we had what locals insist was a "ten-year-event," two weeks of temperatures in the teens. We usually stay above freezing. I thought the tree would surely be dead by spring, but it survived and grew 14".

In last year's local garden tour, my *Cunninghamia lanceolata* 'Samurai' drew raves. I am not a big fan of *Cunninghamia*, but 'Samurai' is an exception, with soft new growth, an eye-catching powder blue that is really stunning. When I bought the tree, I had never heard of *Cunninghamia* and did not have a clue what it would look like all grown up. The tag advised that it was "slow to grow a leader". What an understatement! It remained 12" inches high for almost two years. I thought it was prostrate. Then, in four weeks in October of 2008, it grew to 34". Since then, it has been frantic to impress visitors. A show-off if there ever was one.

Lately I have been experimenting with true firs, which I know prefer colder temperatures and higher elevations, and rocky soil (mine is hardpan sand). Although agonizingly slow to get going, all 25 are coming along. The most enthusiastic is a Manchurian fir (*Abies holophylla*), another conifer I had never heard of before. Its needles are dark green and prickly, and it loves Bandon.

So far, besides never paying attention to advice, my biggest problem is surprisingly with drought. There are no reservoirs here and most of us depend on wells. If we do not get 60" of rain by

summer, many wells start failing. I have had to be extremely careful with watering the young trees because my well has failed twice already. But if I have to choose between bathing and watering conifers, well, you can guess who wins.

About the author: Don Durkee calls himself “new to conifers”, but his enthusiasm is evident from the collection of conifers on his property. Don lives about 2.5 hours from Portland. He welcomes visitors and encourages them to saunter among his intriguing specimens.



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- Watch the website for Bob's forthcoming book on dwarf and miniature conifers to be published this summer.

## The Editor's Corner Conifers as Houseplants?

by Dr. Ronald J. Elardo

Up North plant lovers can visit just about any nursery or plant shop and find conifers that in my neighborhood will not make it through our northern winters. Before what I call my *pre-conifer knowledge*, I tried *Podocarpus macrophyllus* and *Araucaria columnaris* as houseplants only to watch them succumb to the dry heat of forced air furnaces, wither and die. Northern nurseries also sell, as a rule, *Sciadopitys verticillata*, *Cedrus atlantica* (blue Atlas cedar), *Cedrus deodara* 'Eisregen' and *Pinus densiflora* 'Golden Ghost' with little or no warning regarding winter hardiness, survivability and planting location. Sadly, the beauty of spring and summer might very well be followed by the brown and death of fall and winter. My home and gardens are in Adrian, Michigan, Zone 5.

At the ACS National Meeting this past summer in Charlotte, there were many plants at the live and silent auctions. I was mesmerized by them and I wondered how I might carry some back to my home in Zone 5 and help them thrive and grow. I knew they could not be planted outside and overwintered, but Ron Determann, Conservatory Director at the Atlanta Botanical Garden, provided a glimpse of conifers as houseplants in his presentation on Jurassic *Araucaria* and other Southern Hemisphere conifers. Then I had lunch with Tom Cox.

Tom and I talked about conifers south of Zone 5 and the successes he has been having with them in pots. He shared

how the plants spent the spring, summer and fall outside and then were brought indoors for the winter. Tom described the growing medium he has used in order to provide the trees with the best *footing*: pea gravel, fish aquarium charcoal and soil. I listened with great interest as Tom listed the ingredients of the mixture; charcoal at the bottom of the pot "to sweeten" the mixture, pea gravel and soil for a somewhat porous medium. I also had to give them room to grow.

I have visited the Orangerie on the grounds of the palace of Frederick the Great, Sans Souci, in Potsdam, just outside of Berlin in The Federal Republic of Germany. There, potted fruit trees and tropical trees of all kinds spend spring and summer outside. Then, when the cold weather approaches, these large trees are wheeled into the glassed hallways of the Orangerie to spend the winter. I have even seen potted plants on plant-dollies in private gardens throughout Germany that spend the winter in garages. My plants are far smaller than those in Potsdam, but they are very significant to me. And, the principle is the same. Tender plants can winter indoors under the right conditions.

The auctions that evening in Charlotte netted me some interesting specimens of *Sciadopitys verticillata*, *Cunninghamia lanceolata* 'Samurai' and *Cryptomeria japonica* 'Sekkan-sugi'. To them I added from my favorite local nursery Barrett's *Podocarpus macrophyllus* var. 'maki' (two plants), *Cryptomeria*

*japonica* ‘Black Dragon’ (two plants), two more *Sciadopitys verticillata* and three *Araucaria columnaris*. The *Podocarpus* and *Araucaria* have spent their entire time with me indoors. All the others spent the spring and summer outdoors on a southwest facing deck. The plants were fertilized with Osmocote as per instructions on the packaging. In October, when outside temperatures began to get near freezing, the outdoor inhabitants were brought indoors.

Then I purchased at Christmas time a *Picea pungens*, one *Picea glauca* ‘Conica’ and finally *Picea glauca* ‘Jean’s Dilly’. I chose to expand my collection to include Zone 5 hardy conifers because I wanted to see what they would do in the house too. As you know, nurseries have for many years sold potted conifers during the holidays for those interested in having a real, live Christmas tree. My thought was that, if the trees survived the winter indoors, they could remain “houseplants” and I could pass on my research and guidelines to my friends at Barrett’s.

The environment I have provided my coniferous house guests is a room off the dining area. It gets eastern, northern and filtered western light. This light is of course far fewer foot candles than the plants would receive outside. They have maintained their color and their vitality for the most part. My *Sciadopitys* from North Carolina is pushing new growth. However, two of the trees have been stressed. Daytime temperatures never exceed 60°F - 65°F. Nighttime temperatures remain at 60°F or below.

One *Cryptomeria* and one *Sciadopitys* have suffered in their indoor “plant room”. The *Cryptomeria* was within seven feet of a floor heating vent. All the

vents in the plant room had been closed once the trees came in and the overall house temperature had been dialed down to 70°F. That Black Dragon browned on the entire one side that faced into the house proper. A good one-third of the plant dried out and had to be removed. It had already started sending new branches out from the trunk where older branches had died. This plant was the most vibrant and healthy before coming into the house. It had pushed a great deal of new growth during the spring, summer and even into the fall. As of this writing, the tree appears to be in total decline. Much of the new growth is turning brown. The other *Cryptomeria japonica* stands in front of the patio door. It receives eastern light and is doing quite well. It too is pushing new growth.

The *Sciadopitys*, that was across from the stressed and dying *Cryptomeria*, began to experience what I would call radical needle drop. (Tom Cox had admonished me to plant *Sciadopitys* outside.) My stressed *Sciadopitys verticillata* too was facing on one side into the house proper, but was more than ten feet from the heating vent that I believe caused the *Cryptomeria* to suffer. I moved the *Sciadopitys* deeper into the plant room where the temperatures are no more than 60°F on a very sunny day. It appears to be rebounding. At least the needle drop has tapered off.

The conifers are mixed in with my subtropicals (jade trees, cacti and euphorbia) and are lightly fertilized and kept lightly watered from unpurified well water. There is an elevated humidity level in the room from the plants themselves which are causing condensation on the windows on the inside. But that is a small

price to pay for this experiment and for the lives of my conifer houseplants. I have in the past had Norfolk Island pines and they never made it. But my three *Araucaria* have been pushing new growth. They seem to be flourishing in the more temperate plant room.

I do fawn over the trees and I check on them several times during the day. I write in that room, a bit bundled up to be sure, but it is *my* room. I have been warned about what the spring might bring. But once it is safe for them to move out onto my eastern and southern facing decks, they will enjoy the spring and summer outside. In the meantime I had been tickled by the blue Atlas cedar that had been pushing new growth for the past two months. Needle drop had been extremely minimal on it and then disaster struck. The plant went rapidly into decline and has had to be removed from the house.

By the way, my *Cedrus deodara* 'Eisregen' and *Pinus densilifora* 'Golden Ghost' (three of them) get wrapped in burlap late every fall. They are outside. The first year in my garden the largest Golden Ghost browned and I feared it was a total loss. However, it came back more beautiful than ever. (See photo of me with the tree in the Fall 2010 CQ.) 'Eisregen' never suffered winter burn, was wrapped for its first winter and has made it each winter since.

Once the trees exit the house and enjoy their vernal equinox and summer solstice outside, I will post an update as to their successes and, hopefully, not too many failures, or as Barbie Colvin has stated: "...to see how they get through the heat of winter". I am in awe at the prospect of overwintering and even grow-

ing conifers as houseplants. Many thanks, Tom, for the encouragement and the advice. The experiment continues.



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# For the Love of Conifers Thirty Years at Piccadilly Farm

Text and Photos by Flo Chaffin



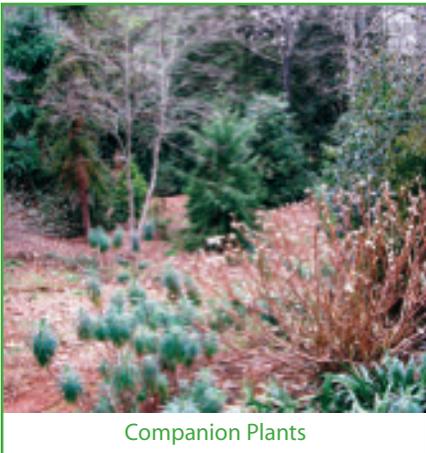
Piccadilly Farm – Conifer Display Beds, Bishop, Georgia

Today was a typical winter day here in the Southeast: gray, foggy, drizzling and that damp, bone-chilling cold. I headed over to Piccadilly Farm to visit with Dr. Sam Jones, and hopped out of the truck to take a quick peek at the garden. Silvers and blues, yellows and golds, giants and little gems of texture shouted from the field. Once again I am reminded: these are the days that make conifers so special, and the reason we should have more in the southeast.

Sam and his wife Carleen started their nursery in 1982 as a hosta and hellebore nursery. At that time, Carleen was

teaching biology in the local high school, and he was a professor of botany at the University of Georgia. At that time Sam remembers “the sex life of pine trees” mentioned in botany, but no real consideration of conifers in ornamental horticulture in the south. Early in the 90’s, they took a trip to England with the Perennial Plant Association, and it was there that they first fell in love with conifers. Conifer “love at first sight” is sometimes an anguishing situation in the southeast. They started buying the conifers a few at a time and set them out in an area

along the driveway. Sometimes they died. Sometimes they thrived. Sometimes what was labeled a dwarf on the west coast turned into a happy plant that quickly outgrew its place in the garden. Little by little their collection expanded. More paths were laid out; more conifers were ordered and propagated. Carleen made sure all the plants were correctly labeled with metal tags, and the evaluations continued. Meanwhile, as Sam likes to point out: “Hellebores paid the bills.”



Companion Plants

Carleen and then Sam retired from teaching and began devoting their full attention to the nursery. They also joined ACS as Life Members, and actively participated in meetings and tours around the country. Sam also served the South-eastern Region as a national board member, and hosted the National ACS meeting tour in 2000. Piccadilly Farm has been celebrating “Conifer Days” in the late fall for all of their customers for a good while now. Year after year they have traveled and learned about conifers and then they have brought those lessons home to Piccadilly Farm for a true test.



*Juniperus deppeana* 'McFetter'

I asked Sam if he would give me the names of a few of his favorite conifers. He smiled and answered that probably his favorite was the one he was standing in front of at the time. Sure enough, when we went out to walk around the nursery, I ended up with a list of favorites that was about two pages! I think I'll narrow it down to a few cultivars from a handful of genera.

#### For Sun in the SE

*Cupressus arizonica* var. *glabra*  
'Sulphurea'

*Cupressus arizonica* var. *glabra*  
'Silver Smoke'

*Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Crippsii'

*Thuja occidentalis* 'Golden Globe'



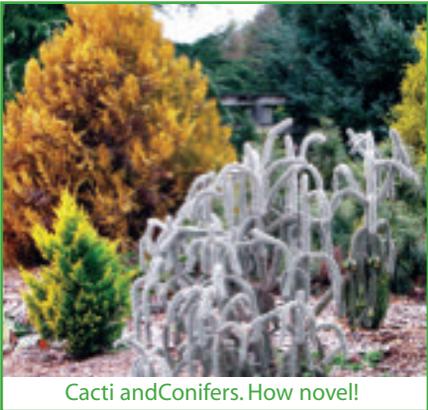
Sun Beds at Piccadilly Farms



Shade Beds at Piccadilly Farms

### Part Shade in the SE

*Pinus densiflora* cultivars  
*Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Squarrosa',  
 'Snow'  
*Thuja koraiensis*  
*Juniperus conferta* 'Silver Mist'



Cacti and Conifers. How novel!

### For Shade in the SE

*Cephalotaxus* of all kinds  
*Cryptomeria japonica* 'Gyokuryu',  
 'Tansu', 'Globosa Nana'  
*Thujopsis dolabrata*

Our SE Regional meeting for 2011 will be held in Athens, GA on the weekend of October 21-23, 2011. At this time, we are finalizing details which will be published on the ACS website, and also in the next *CQ* issue. But we do know that Piccadilly Farm will be hosting a tour and the lunch venue for this meeting. Here's your chance to stroll the paths of Sam's sun and shade conifer gardens and have his guidance about which ones have worked best for him over these many years. The garden and nursery are located on an interesting piece of property that spans over 5 acres. You'll find every habitat and culture, from deep ravines with heavily wooded shade to bright, open and airy fields full of sun-loving plants. You'll enjoy a good look at a year-round vegetable garden that always has some crop to offer. You'll have an opportunity to compare mature specimens of many conifers with those same plants in one and three gallon pots in the nursery. You'll also enjoy the wide range of companion plants, including hellebores and unusual shade plants. I encourage you all to save these dates on your calendar and



See something you like? Take it home!

## Contact the Editor

**Dr. Ronald J. Elardo**

**5749 Hunter Ct.**

**Adrian, MI 49221-2471**

**517-902-7230**

**conifereditor@yahoo.com**

consider joining us at this meeting. There's a lot to learn about growing conifers in the south, but also a lot to love.

*Piccadilly Farm is located in Bishop, GA. The nursery can be reached by phone at 706-769-6516 or by email at piccadilly-farm@att.net.*



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# Going.....Go

By Barbie Colvin and Monya Barnes

## Where do your Regional auction dollars go?

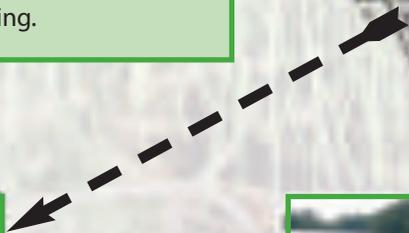
As you are driving home from your Regional ACS meeting with a truck full of new plants, have you ever wondered what happens to the money you just spent at the auction? If you are in the Southeast Region, your auction dollars create grants that are awarded to ACS Reference Gardens within our Region. To date, 9 of the 12 Reference Gardens in the SE have applied for and received grants to expand their conifer collection, either through additional plants, interpretive signage or conducting conifer specific educational programs. Since public education and outreach are such key components of the ACS mission, helping our public gardens through Regional grants is a great way to partner our energy and everyone wins. By participating in your Regional auction, you're also helping your regional Reference Gardens. Start saving your pennies and plan to attend your 2011 meeting.



REGIO



TREAS



**Money generated at auction goes to a Reference Garden to improve their Conifer program.**



**Atlanta Botanical Gardens  
Atlanta, GA**



**J Sargeant I  
Community  
Goochla**

# Going.....GONE!



**Successful bidder takes auction plants home!**

REGIONAL



TREASURY

**Money generated at auction goes to a Reference Garden to improve their Conifer program.**



**Plant Reynolds Community College  
Richmond, VA**



**South Carolina Botanical Garden  
Clemson, SC**

# Reference Gardens 101

by Flo Chaffin

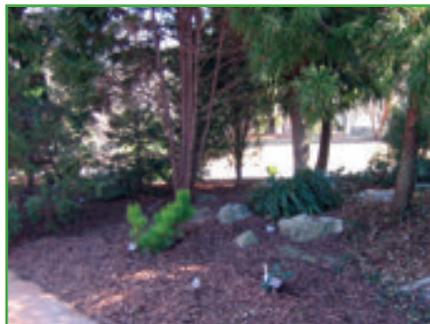
When two groups work together to benefit both partners, it's a beautiful thing. That beautiful thing is blossoming between public gardens and American Conifer Society members through our **Reference Garden Program**. The ACS has a mission to promote, propagate and conserve conifers and to educate the public about them. Public gardens have multiple missions, but most include conservation of special plant material, horticultural display and education of the public. By joining together, ACS members and their local public gardens are helping each other carry out their missions while enjoying themselves as they do.

## So, what exactly is a reference garden?

The idea comes as a way to offer a "point of reference" for conifers that grow locally. It is a means for our members to see and compare larger numbers and specimens of conifers. For ACS purposes, the garden must be an institutional ACS member, open to the public and must have a minimum number and variety of well labeled conifers in its collection. Other requirements include sponsorship by at least two ACS members. (see Reference Gardens at the ACS website (<http://www.conifersociety.org>))

In return, public gardens have the opportunity to develop a closer relationship with their garden sponsors and local ACS members, to expand the avenues of public relations between the two groups, and to apply for conifer related grants from their regional ACS. This regional money comes directly from our annual regional

meetings, and goes back into the regional gardens. Each region has some room to focus on its needs from this program, but all support the conifer related outreach that these public gardens give us.



Conifer Grant at the  
Atlanta Botanical Gardens

**Why have Reference Gardens?** As described above, reference gardens expand the outreach of the ACS in its mission to display conifers and to educate the public. That alone can be a huge benefit to current ACS members who have joined to learn about this group of plants. In addition, Reference Gardens can help to touch potential new members of a much wider range of age. Certainly we need new and younger members to remain a vibrant group. When the ACS gives its approval to a Reference Garden, both the garden and the ACS gain credibility. The more gardens that carry the ACS banner in well kept conifer displays, the more the ACS gains in member benefit, new member potential, and public awareness.

**How does a member find a Reference Garden to visit?**



David Seward and Peter Jones  
Photo by Scott Burrell

Depending on your location in the country, there may be a few to a large number of gardens participating. The full list of Reference Gardens should appear on the ACS website, and in the *Conifer Quarterly* periodically. For sure, the Southeastern Region leads the pack with 12 Reference Gardens. But then again, we may need more examples of conifer displays than the rest of the country does. SE members have found a good number of local gardens who are excited to learn more about conifers, and want to pass on their knowledge and growing enthusiasm. In addition, grants from ACS regions have helped those gardens spread the word about conifers. Grant money has supported ideas ranging from a full day symposium on conifers to a brand new conifer garden; from the renovation of an overgrown dwarf conifer display to new labeling in an existing conifer garden. All these and more are examples of conifer related activities going on in the SE.

**How can you get involved?** If you have a Reference Garden in your area, pop in and say hello. Offer your support. If there isn't one nearby, go to your favorite local garden and suggest the possibility of the



Atlanta Botanical Gardens

**Reference Garden Program.** If the garden isn't already an institutional member of ACS, ask them to join us. Show them what a partnership with the ACS can do for them, and challenge them to think of ways to bring the beauty of conifers to their garden visitors. As a society, we have relatively small numbers with a large mission. By joining with public gardens, I think we can "...have the beginning of a beautiful friendship".

Look to upcoming issues of the *Conifer Quarterly* to highlight specific Reference Gardens and their conifer related activities.



East Tennessee State University

Photos of the Atlanta Botanical Gardens and East Tennessee State University Reference Garden by Babie Colvin

## Reference Gardens of the American Conifer Society by Region

### Northeastern:

Graver Arboretum, Bath, Pennsylvania  
Wellesley College Botanic Gardens,  
Wellesley, Massachusetts

### Southeastern:

Atlanta Botanical Garden, Atlanta, Georgia  
East Tennessee State University Arboretum,  
Johnson City, Tennessee  
J.C. Ralston Arboretum, Raleigh, North  
Carolina  
J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College,  
Western Campus, Al Gardner  
Conifer Garden, Goochland, Virginia  
Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond,  
Virginia  
Lockerly Arboretum, Milledgeville,  
Georgia  
Smith-Gilbert Gardens, Kennesaw, Georgia  
South Carolina Botanical Garden, Clemson,  
South Carolina  
State Arboretum of Virginia, Boyce, Virginia  
State Botanical Garden of Georgia,  
Athens, Georgia  
University of Tennessee Gardens,  
Knoxville, Tennessee  
University of Tennessee, West Tennessee  
Research and Education Center Gardens,  
Jackson, Tennessee

### Central:

Hidden Lake Gardens, Tipton, Michigan  
Rowe Arboretum, Indian Hill, Ohio

### Western:

The Oregon Garden, Silverton, Oregon



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## The Justin C. "Chub" Harper Award of Merit for Development in the Field of Conifers.

At its February 5, 2011 Board of Directors Meeting in Orlando, Florida, the American Conifer Society's Board unanimously approved the naming of its Award of Merit for Development in the Field of Conifers in honor of Chub Harper. It was noted by Board members that Chub so generously gave of his time, his knowledge and his plants to the furthering of the knowledge of conifers.

### Publication Dates

Issue	Calendar Quarter	Deadline to submit articles	Publication Date (approx. mailing)
Winter	Jan/Feb/Mar	Nov 22	Jan 15
Spring	Apr/May/Jun	Feb 15	Apr 15
Summer	Jul/Aug/Sept	May 15	July 15
Fall	Oct/Nov/Dec 31	Aug 15	Oct 15

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# The Johnson Sculpture Garden

Text and Photos by Jack Ayers

In previous issues of the *Quarterly* I have written about two gardens in the small town of Roseburg, Oregon: that of Ken and Elena Jordan (Spring 2009) and that created by my wife, Sharon, and me (Summer 2010), both of which will be visited during the Post Conference Tour following the ACS Annual Meeting in Oregon this August. In this article I briefly describe a third garden in Roseburg which was visited during the American Conifer Society's Western Region Meeting last August.

After a seemingly endless drive along the crest of a ridge running north from the town, as you approach the garden of Willis and Marion Johnson you encounter the gate pictured in Photo 1, and you know you are entering a special place. But for the concrete griffins on top

of the pillars (of which only one is shown), Willis created the entire entry. The Johnsons bought this six acre ridge-top lot with its commanding views of the town down in the valley and the distant Cascade Mountains in 1980, built the beautiful house themselves and started the garden in 1982. Many of the choice conifers in the garden date from the early years. At this time Willis was an independent log hauler for the then thriving timber industry, but he found the time to build many paths, low walls, and structures in the garden, which was primarily Marion's province.

When Willis retired in 1989 (he is now 85 years old), he indulged his interest in woodworking, creating some marvelous pieces, but then in about 1990 Marion asked if he might be able to make



1. Sculpted steel and brick entry to the garden.

her a pair of large steel herons for the garden. He had become a proficient welder while maintaining his log hauling equipment, so he welcomed the challenge. These first statues, which are still in the garden, look a little rough, but he enjoyed the work and has since spent much of the seasonally wet local weather creating ever more sophisticated pieces. He has never had any art training and is very modest about his work, but visitors to the garden are invariably impressed with his technical skill and fertile imagination. Though many of his creations are fanciful animals, the first sculptures inside the gate in Photo 1 are the deliberately primitive trees shown in Photo 2. When I see them I wonder that he has not sculpted a dinosaur to go with them. These sculptures and his others are made by first constructing an armature with the desired outlines using 1/4 inch diameter steel rod, then building up the outer surface with adjoining strips of one inch by 1/8 inch steel

strap. Any smaller features such as the leaves in Photo 2 are then welded on. He then grinds off any welding defects and brazes on a thin, irregular layer of brass and bronze to create an interesting and colorful surface texture. After a thorough cleaning the sculpture is powder coated with a transparent finish to prevent rusting.

The garden has many fine mature conifers, both native and exotic. One of the natives is the incense cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*) which is prominent in Photo 2. This species is locally common, but few are as attractive as this one. Several attractive conifers are evident in Photo 3, as well as a few deciduous plants. In the center of the photo is one of several lovingly trained *Cedrus atlantica* 'Glauca Pendula' trees featured in the garden. The feathery mass of foliage just above the cedar consists of three intermingled *Microbiota decussata* (Siberian cypress) in transition between their sum-



2. Prehistoric trees, reeds and ferns.



3. Modest pond with an elaborate backdrop.

mer and winter color. Behind them are two large *Thuja*, one on either side of a *Pinus thunbergiana*, and to their right two *Cupressus sempervirens*, with another *Thuja*, partially hidden by the autumn colored *Styrax* and the large *Chamaecyparis obtusa* on the extreme right. Centered right above the fountain is a pompom juniper, to its right an *Acer palmatum*, (probably ‘Crimson Queen’), and to its right a large (for this cultivar) *Betula pendula* ‘Trost Dwarf’ which has shed its leaves.

I am not usually a fan of trees trained as pompoms, but one cannot fail to be impressed with the pine (probably *Pinus contorta*) in Photo 4, which has been trained for about twenty-five years. It is so dense that from a distance you would think it were a juniper. Peeking out from under the *Cedrus atlantica* ‘Glaucu Pendula’ trained along the wall in Photo 4 is Willis’ first garden sculpture, a concrete

dragon he made even before this house was built. This poor dragon is nearly hidden by the Atlas cedar and the massive ground cover juniper in front of it. Unlike it, the eight foot wide steel spider on the hill in the background is totally out in the open and is ready to spring. This spider is one of many fetching animals spread through the garden. These include a giant dragonfly (just discernible in Photo 3), two pairs of large birds, a three-foot-long



4. Front lawn with a pomped pine which would do a Japanese gardener proud.



5. Dramatic dragon in a dramatic setting.

turtle, a pair of winged griffins modeled on the one shown in Photo 1, and a seated, three piece musical frog ensemble (consisting of a cellist, a saxophonist, and a vocalist). The garden also features two large dragons, the one shown in Photo 5 being my favorite of all his creations. This dragon is about eight feet wide, but its wings are removable, so even though it is made of steel, it can be moved relatively easily. The plants flanking it are different cultivars of *Chamaecyparis obtusa*, and behind it are *Cedrus atlantica* 'Glauca Pendula' and a large *Pinus nigra*. The hill in the background is one of the foothills of the Cascade Mountains, which are evident on a clearer day.

All of the photos shown here were taken on the front side of the house. The rear of the house is bordered by a large bed featuring mature conifers and containing a variety of other ornamental plants. Beyond this bed is a wide expanse of lawn sloping down toward town. It is

punctuated with island beds of conifers and native trees, and, in the spring, large beautiful sweeps of self-sown anemones (probably *Anemone blanda*) in shades of white, pink, red, and purple. These set a spectacular foreground for the fine old conifers.

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*About the author:* Jack and his wife, Sharon, are life members of the Society, having joined in 1990 while living in Virginia. There Jack was employed as a civilian scientist at the Naval Research Laboratory in Washington, DC, and Sharon was an executive secretary with Raytheon in Falls Church, Virginia. They took early retirement in 1998 and returned to their native Northwest to indulge their passion for gardening.

---

## Conifer Road Less Traveled – Part 1

by Tom Cox

Reading Dennis Groh's article on old growth *Taxodium* in Florida got me thinking about a trip I made in February 2009 to document conifers in Florida. Aside from it being cold in Georgia, the principal purpose of the trip was to observe conifer adaptability in warm climates and how far south they can be successfully grown.

As a starting premise, when one thinks of conifers, they usually conjure up places such as Rochester, NY, Tipton, MI, Portland, OR, Taos, NM and Asheville, NC. Increasingly cities such as Atlanta, Knoxville, Richmond and Nacogdoches, Texas are becoming places where conifers are making their presence known. In fact, the southeastern U.S. is now the fastest growing region in the ACS. Still, no one ever thinks about Florida.

The first stop was all the way down in Coral Gables where Evelyn and I were the guests of the Montgomery Botanical Center. We spent three nights in this garden paradise. Established in 1959, Montgomery Botanical Center (originally The Montgomery Foundation) was established by Nell Montgomery Jennings in memory of her husband, Colonel Robert H. Montgomery, and his love of palms and cycads. Today, Montgomery Botanical Center advances botanical research and has added conservation of rare conifer species. Those readers familiar with *Picea pungens* 'Montgomery' will draw an instant connection. Robert and Nell also founded the world famous Fairchild Tropical Garden (now The

Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden) that is an adjacent property.

The focus on conifers is relatively new and is spearheaded by Dr. Chad Husby. Chad is working closely with well respected institutions such as the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, Atlanta Botanical Garden and the Huntington Botanical Gardens in an effort to collect rare and endangered conifer species from areas such as New Caledonia, Australia, New Guinea, the Caribbean, the Azores and Africa. While much of their collections are from cuttings, most were from material that was originally collected in the wild.

Not since visiting the University of California Santa Cruz Botanical Garden have I seen such an impressive collection of *Araucaria* growing in a natural setting. Aside from seeing the numerous *Araucaria* species such as *A. subulata*, there were other genera, to include *Agathis*,



*Araucaria* at Montgomery Botanic Center.  
Photo by Dr. Chad Husby



*Podocarpus rumphii*,  
Harry P. Leu Gardens, Orlando, FL.  
Photo by Dr. Chad Husby



*Cupressus kashmeriana*,  
Harry P. Leu Gardens, Orlando, FL.  
Photo by Eric Schmidt

*Podocarpus* and *Nageia*. There were even a number of more temperate conifers that have demonstrated cold hardiness at least as far north as Zone 7. Among these are *Cunninghamia*, *Cupressus lusitanica* and *Cryptomeria*.

Another exciting element of this visit was to receive trial plants for evaluation back at our arboretum in Canton, GA (Zone 7). As all gardeners know, plants do not read labels or reference books and what we might have been led to believe was not hardy, sometimes is.

The Montgomery Botanical Center is open to the public by appointment and is well worth a visit – especially in winter.

The next stop was the Harry P. Leu Gardens in Orlando. Leu Gardens is a botanical oasis and the climate of Central Florida is a great location for conifer evaluation of temperate cultivars (*Abies*

*firma*, *Pseudotsuga sinensis* and *Cryptomeria* cultivars) and selected tropical conifers such as *Afrocarpus falcatus* and *Araucaria hunsteinii*. Another group of conifers that shows promise are the Mexican pines – some of which are hardy as far north as Zone 7 and possibly farther. They have only recently begun to evaluate these and, since Mexico contains more pine species than any other place on earth, the possibilities are exciting. ACS member Eric Schmidt is the Botanic Records Specialist and is in charge of the conifer collection. He has been evaluating various conifers for well over five years and has proved that, with proper site selection and attention to cultural requirements, there are a number of conifers that can be successfully cultivated in Central Florida. It is always interesting to walk into a garden and discover plants growing where



*Cephalotaxus fortunei* (left) and *Glyptostrobus pensilis* (right),  
Kanapaha Botanical Gardens, Gainesville, FL.

Photos by Adam Black

you don't expect to see them. On his website ([www.lovett-pinetum.org](http://www.lovett-pinetum.org)) ACS member Robert Lovett, who owns pineta in Texas, California and Missouri, refers to it as "zonal denial".

It was then on northward to Gainesville for a visit to Kanapaha Botanical Gardens. I have known their head propagator and ACS member, Adam Black, for several years and he is what I refer to as a man out of control. No distance seems to be too great for him to be chasing plants, and conifers have become a passion. Likely no place in Florida is planting more conifers and, judging from what I saw, he has broken the code. I have suggested to him that Kanapaha should apply for status as an ACS Reference Garden. Kanapaha is a bit different from most public gardens; the 62-acre facility was developed and is operated by the North Florida Botanical Society, a non-profit educational organization. The Society has a lease agreement with Alachua County whereby it gained access to a 33-acre tract of land for the development of a public botanical garden; in 1982, an additional 29-acre parcel was added to the lease, bringing Kanapaha Botanical Gardens to its present size. If in the area or

passing close by, I seriously recommend you stop for a visit. This is a beautiful garden with many interesting plants.



The cutting bench at Kanapaha Botanical  
Gardens, Gainesville, FL.

Photo by Adam Black

My last stop in Florida was to visit the campus of the University of Florida to meet with Dr. Jason Smith, Assistant Professor of Forest Pathology. Dr. Smith is conducting leading-edge research on conifers to include disease and pest control and garden-worthy selections. One of the more interesting plants was a hybrid *Araucaria* (*A. araucana* x *angustifolia*) which may offer resistance to root rot (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*), which is the

principal limiting factor to growing the Monkey Puzzle tree (*Araucaria araucana*) in the southeastern U.S. Dr. Smith is also working with the Atlanta Botanical Gardens to understand better the biology of canker disease devastating the Florida torrey (*Torreya taxifolia*), a critically endangered endemic conifer of the Apalachicola River basin.

I would be remiss if I did not mention our final stop. Way down south in Tifton, Georgia (as in way hot), the University of Georgia runs a site called the Coastal Plain Experiment Station. One of their faculty, Dr. John Ruter, has been heavily involved in conifer research for over 15 years at this location. His research and extension activities are focused on nursery crop production and plant breeding and selection for the southeastern United States. One of his doctoral students, Ryan Contreras, was a recipient of an ACS scholarship for his research on winter browning of *Cryptomeria*. The UGA test plot is several acres, and here one can easily answer the question – can conifers be grown well in warmer climates? There is row after row of magnificent *Cupressus* species along with rare

pinus such as *Pinus pseudostrobus*. Other rarely seen conifers that were seen flourishing include *Keteleeria evelyniana*, *Taiwania cryptomerioides* (*flousiana*) and numerous selections of *Cryptomeria*. A number of selections have been made from John's breeding work, and I expect that we will see many of them in the nursery trade.

For some readers, I expect that it is likely difficult to relate to many of the genera mentioned in this article. Where you garden, it is too cold. Over the past several years we have been experimenting with growing warm climate conifers as houseplants and have found them very easy to over-winter indoors. The original suggestion came from Ron Determann of the Atlanta Botanical Gardens.

On a closing note, those of us who have reached retirement status are lucky if we have found a passion that holds our interest and occupies our time. For me, I find nothing more exhilarating than to spend time with people who work with plants.

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# Using Hypertufa to Contain Dwarf Conifers

Text and Photos by Michael Larkin

After attending my first National ACS conference in Oregon several years ago, my idea of using single season annuals in containers changed. Container gardens typically include tall spindly plants surrounded by colorful annuals, planted in faded plastic containers. As the season comes to an end, the plants get sadly redirected to the compost bin, one season and gone.

The conference tour visited several beautiful display gardens where I saw hypertufa (stone like) containers planted with small conifers and alpine perennials arranged to form miniature landscapes. I realized then that there was a new group of plants that I could use in my container gardens. It did not take too long for my Pennsylvania garden to include many conifer containers of all shapes and sizes.

After the conference my goal was to create containers just like the ones I had seen in Oregon. I purchased and made many different containers. I experimented with different plants, different soil mixes and then I worked on making my own containers. This is what I found to work best for me.

## Hypertufa Containers

Hypertufa allows you to be creative, childlike, and artistic, while making your own container. Even mistakes can look good. (photo A) Instructions on how to make hypertufa containers can be found on the internet and in many garden magazines. However the most complete source of information was in the book,



Photo A – A lovely mistake.

*Creating and Planting Garden Troughs* by Joyce Fingerrut and Rex Murfitt.

There are many ways to make hypertufa. My formula starts with equal parts of Portland cement, peat moss, and perlite. Thoroughly mix the cement with water to form a damp, but not wet mixture. Add liquid cement color to the wet mix to make the container more decorative. Apply the mix, about 1½” thick, to the inside (or outside) of a mold, usually a large plastic container. After a day, gently remove the slightly hardened hypertufa from the mold. Wire brush the pot to create a textured, stone-like finish. Place the container in a plastic bag to keep it moist, slowly allowing it to cure for a few weeks. As it cures, the container will become stronger. Once properly cured, these containers can remain weather resistant for many years.

## Planting Mix

Building a house requires a good foundation. Making a good container garden requires great soil. Whether you are growing conifers in hypertufa containers or annuals in plastic pots, success begins with creating a healthy environment for root growth. The growing medium has to provide roots with sufficient oxygen and also allow gas exchange in the root zone. Bagged potting soil is mostly peat moss and within a short time the peat moss breaks down and compacts. My conifers need to stay in the containers for a few years and, therefore, the soil mix needs to remain functional. While searching the internet for just the right soil mix, I discovered the Garden Web forum and read about Al's Gritty Mix, one of two mixes created by Al Fassezke – or "tapla" as he is known on the forum. His mix of ingredients not only creates a well drained, highly aerated soil for containers, but also allows for air to move through the root system and by-product gasses to escape. The ideal growing environment!

### Al's Gritty Mix

- 1 part uncomposted screened pine or fir bark (1/8-1/4") such as *Shultz Soil Conditioner*
- 1 part screened *Turface* (by Profile), or *NAPA floor Dry # 8022* – screen over insect screen and discard the fines or use in hypertufa
- 1 part crushed *Gran-I-Grit* (grower size) or #2 cherrystone, usually found at farm/feed store

When you make your own containers you can control the size and number of drainage holes. My containers have at least one 2" drainage hole which is then covered with a piece of window screen. We have been taught to use a layer of gravel on the bottom of the container beneath the soil to improve container drainage – no longer true. Instead of extra water draining immediately into the gravel, the water actually "perches" or gathers in the soil just above the gravel. This wet area has no air space, which is not an ideal environment for roots. Roots grow best in well aerated soil. So the addition of gravel only reduces the available space for roots to grow. More detailed information on "perched water table" can be found by doing a search on the internet.

## Plant selection

Unfortunately the conifers used in the container will eventually outgrow their space, and using slower growing plants will keep your planting undisturbed for a few years.

Conifers are classified as mini (grows less than 1" per yr.), or dwarf (grows 1-6" per yr), which helps when selecting the right plant for your container. The next concern will be to pick a plant that will survive the winter in a container. Start by using a plant that is at least one zone colder than your zone. However, additional winter protection may still be needed. (photo B)

Here are just a few examples of conifers and perennials that I have been able to grow successfully year round in containers in my USDA Zone 6 garden: *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Nana', Zone 5, *Juniperus communis* 'Gold Cone', Zone



Photo B – Mix of succulents and a miniature conifer

4, *Picea glauca* ‘Jean’s Dilly’, Zone 4. There are hundreds of alpine perennials, for example, selections of *Sedum*, Zones 2,3,4 and *Thymus* Zone 3, *Sempervivum* - Zones 3, 4, and occasionally I use non-hardy succulents like *Echeveria*, Zones 8, 9 – around 150 species – which I bring inside as it begins to get cold.

#### **Planting your container**

A conifer container can have a design, one conifer in one container, or you can create a mini landscape. Many nurseries now carry mini and dwarf conifers in 4” containers, making it easy to plant multiple conifers and several alpine perennials in one container.

Design is a matter of personal taste. I place a tall accent plant, possibly a small

juniper, off center in the container. To create a natural looking scene, place a grouping of rocks inter-planted with several alpine perennials around the conifer, add a creeping sedum or thyme to hang over and soften the edge. Mixing leaf textures will create visual interest. Once everything is planted cover the soil with a mulch of fine gravel.

### Maintenance

Conifer containers require a sunny location and minimal care once established. Newly planted containers will need to be watered a little more frequently until the roots get established. Since the recommended soil mix has no nutrients, fertilizer is required. Care should be given not to overfertilize. More is not better no matter what you grow. Excess fertilizer in soil makes it more difficult for plants to absorb water and nutrients. Only give plants what they need. I have found good success with a fertilizer that has low NPK (nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium). I use a very weak solution of liquid fertilizer on a frequent basis. In nature, plants do better with regular access to low levels of nutrients, as opposed to sudden large infusions. I use a fertilizer like Dyna-Gro's Foliage-Pro 9-3-6, or similar NPK in a 3:1:2 ratio. It has all the primary macronutrients, secondary macronutrients (Ca, Mg, S) and all the micronutrients. Its NPK formula is very close to the ratio most plants actually use. I also supplement with a little time-release fertilizer in case I forget to apply the liquid fertilizer.

### Winter care

Many conifer containers can be kept

outside all year. However, plant survival will increase if you provide some extra protection. Roots are exposed to colder temps in containers than they are if growing in the ground. As I mentioned above, select plants that are at least one zone lower than yours. As winter approaches, one option is to relocate the container to a microclimate near the foundation of your house. Avoid the south side because it might cause the plants to warm and freeze resulting in heaving. For colder climates dig a shallow hole and sink the container in the hole. Mulch the container. Another option would be to place the container in an unheated garage or shed. The plants do not need light during the dormant period. Bring the pot back out as the temperature outside begins to warm in the spring. (photo C)



Photo C – A final product

Container gardening with conifers is something that anyone can do, even if you only have a small patio or deck. You are limited only by your imagination and a sunny location. This summer I look forward to visiting Oregon again during the 2011 ACS National Conference. Who knows what new idea I will return home with this time.

# ACS Central Region Meeting June 17 – 18, 2011 in Ames, Iowa

Text and Photos by Pam Maurer

Gateway Hotel and Conference Center  
US-30 & University Blvd, Ames, IA.  
800-367-2637 or 515-292-8600

Iowa has a lot to offer, and wonderful landscapes top the list. Not just fabulous tour gardens, this convention offers some outstanding “pre” and “post” gardens! Many are described below with additional gardens and nurseries for perennial and hosta lovers. Pictures of many tour and supporting gardens may be viewed on *Evergreen Gardens* facebook page.

## “Pre” and “Post” Gardens:

At ‘Walkabout Gardens’, home of Merwyn & Nan Ripley, you will find witch’s brooms, a ‘blue’ redbud, and hundreds of unusual plants & trees. A daylily hybridizer, Nan plants about 3,000 new seedlings each year. Over 400 *Lilium* should be in bloom for your visit. Guaranteed... you will enjoy this one!

A residential yard transformed from a mass of sod to a maze of conifer beds and rock gardens, Bruce Pesch & Carol Lewnau have an interesting landscape showcasing over 75 conifers representing



"Blue" Redbud Tree in the garden of Merwyn and Nan Ripley



Jack and Lois Girton have turned their property into a “collection of conifers”.

9 genera and more than 25 species! The “most unique” part of the yard is the miniature garden designed by their daughter, Sarah. A young landscape, but well worth the time.

An acreage in town? A rare commodity to be sure. Jack & Lois Girton have turned their property into a ‘collection of collections’. Siberian iris, hostas, peonies, grasses, shrubs and, of course, conifers weave in and out amongst each other providing color and interest year round. Host to the National Siberian Iris convention in 2000 and praised for the effective use of color and texture in a 2008 *Iowa Magazine* article, this property has something for everyone.

Anyone interested in shopping for conifers will want to visit Evergreen Gardens, a “niche nursery” specializing in garden conifers, alpine plants and hand-made troughs. Located at the home of John & Pam Maurer, this nursery opened as a result of Pam’s own experimentation; beginning with perennials, ending with

garden conifers. Or so she thought, until a fascination with rock gardens and alpine plants emerged. A one-of-a-kind limestone fountain stands amongst the limestone boulders and miniature conifers in the rock garden. Favorite conifers and grasses have replaced most of the perennials and shrubs. A unique place to spend some time!

Be sure to stop at the home of Larry & Judi Greene in Alleman. This property has much to offer from the hillside perennial garden rich in color, to the rock garden tucked in by the front door. A ‘garden in the making’ with some fun things to see!

Garden railroad enthusiasts will want to come early and visit Kidman Tree Farm. Open Monday – Friday 9:00 am – 5:00 pm. 100 feet of trestle, two 8 foot tunnels, a covered bridge, 2 steel bridges and 500 feet of railroad wind around three ponds. 200 feet of track runs overhead inside the Christmas Gift shop. Mike & Renee Kidman currently have the largest

G scale train dealership in Iowa and Nebraska.

Located in Madrid, the *Iowa Arboretum* is just a 20 minute drive from Ames. Exciting things are happening here! Fall 2010 launched the massive project of updating and redesigning the conifer gardens. A rock garden has been installed and worn-out conifers removed or relocated to make room for newer specimens. The arboretum contains 19 collections on 40 acres of land. In addition there is a 348 acre preserve, offering self-guided woodland trails that pass by scenic overlooks, deep ravines, and streams. A beautiful natural Iowa landscape. This is a nonprofit organization funded solely by memberships and donations.

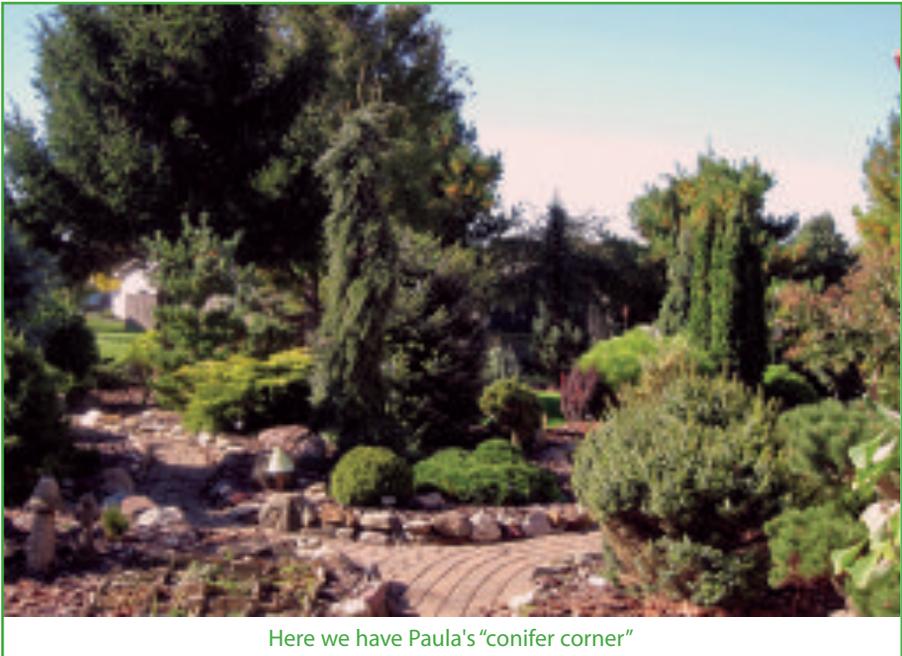
**Tour Gardens:**

From the *conifer bear* guarding the entrance to the *garden quilt* along a path, Joe & Paula Flynn have an incredibly

unique landscape! Troughs everywhere, chainsaw art, fountains, cactus, rock gardens and conifers galore await you around every turn. Be sure to walk slowly through this yard or you will miss something!

Greg & Constance Skinner have been avid collectors of rare grafts and brooms introduced by ACS members for years. Their one-acre lot interconnects with a pond and golf course, creating a “park-like setting”. Islands of conifers... one can only imagine what little gems you will find here!

With so much to see at Alan & Emily Munson’s (and the offer of homemade dessert), we decided to make this our lunch stop! This is a great yard in which to educate yourself! Specimen conifers that have had the time and space to grow, hosta and perennial collections, unique and rare trees are all here. But don’t get



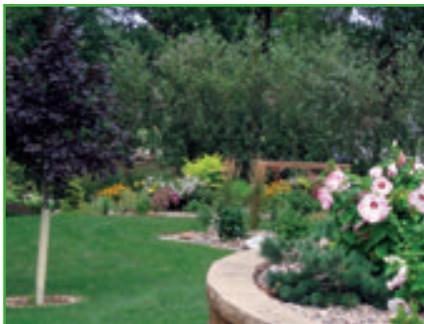
Here we have Paula's "conifer corner"



Greg and Constance Skinner share their collection "...of rare grafts and brooms"

lost... the bus won't wait!

Mark & Carolyn Kehrli have been collecting conifers just a few years, carefully selecting each specimen for a particular place in their landscape. A flair for decorating, Carolyn has incorporated perennials into the gardens with grace and elegance. Yard art, island beds, a fire pit, and surprises at each turn.



The Kehrli's combine conifers with art and so much more

Gardening in water. Sound familiar to anyone? Bob & Judy Rudman have a complex yard... steep slopes and a slough of water at the bottom. You will enjoy the phenomenal hardscaping (single-handedly done by Bob), interesting plant selections, and an amazing waterfall!

Known by all the garden groups in the area, Greg and Sue Olson have created a collector's paradise. Successful co-mingling of water features, garden art, perennials, & conifers create a tranquil and serene setting. More viewers each year, and of course, each year more to view!



A part of the Olson's paradise

Mark your calendars for a conifer-filled weekend in the heart of the Midwest! A backyard BBQ on Friday night kicks off the event. Hamburgers to steak, apple pie to pound cake, interesting and funny speakers, and a fun, conifer-filled day of garden tours to boot! Lest we not forget, the live and silent auctions! Never will you have a better opportunity to learn about conifers and how to use them in your landscape than by participating in a Conifer Convention!

**Conifers are found on every continent except Antarctica.**

**Next Issue: Summer 2011**

**Our next issue will feature Minatures in the Garden.**

Conifers are an amazement over which we and nature share stewardship. They are such unique plants that surprise all who stop by to sojourn. The themes proposed are meant to inspire and to inquire. Whether you are a novice, an explorer or a connoisseur and you have a story to tell – a favorite conifer, pictures, plant care, problem solutions, a new hybrid or cultivar, we want to hear from you. We welcome any interpretation or addition to the main themes we offer.

**Future Issue Themes:** Please look at future themes and consider sending your articles in advance of published deadlines.

Me and my favorite Conifer (Fall)

Defending the Garden against Deer and Rodents (Winter)

We at *Conifer Quarterly* welcome news alerts about conifers or about our members.

Contact Dr. Ronald J. Elardo (conifereditor@yahoo.com) to discuss your ideas.



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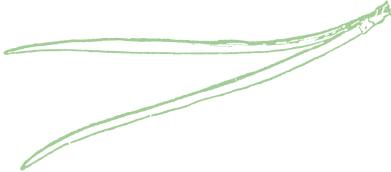
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*Abies concolor*  
Photo by Don Wild



*Cupressus glabra* 'Blue Ice'  
Photo by Don Wild