

ConiferQuarterly

Vol. 31 No 3

Summer 2014

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Hurray for Weeds!



Return to Rochester



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

Summer 2014 • Volume 31, No 3

The *Conifer Quarterly* (ISSN 8755-0490) is published quarterly by the American Conifer Society. The Society is a non-profit organization incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and is tax exempt under section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Service Code.

You are invited to join our Society. Please address membership and other inquiries to the American Conifer Society National Office, PO Box 1583, Maple Grove, MN 55311. Membership: US & Canada \$38, International \$58 (indiv.), \$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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By Brian Jacob

I grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area, where I liked plants since I was a young child. I earned a degree in Ornamental Horticulture from Cal Poly State University in San Luis Obispo. But it wasn't until my wholesale nursery employer transferred me to Oregon from Southern California that I was exposed to the amazing array of cultivated conifers. In 2001, nursery industry friends in Oregon encouraged me to attend a regional event at the legendary Stanley & Sons Nursery in Boring, Oregon, owned by ACS past President Larry Stanley. There I joined the Society; not because I was instantly smitten with conifers, but more out of curiosity and a desire to learn more about this group of plants. They were unfamiliar to me (and since I could choose two free conifers if I joined at the event).

I have been fortunate to attend 10 national meetings and 12 Western regional meetings where I've met many friendly and interesting Society members and fellow "coneheads" from across our nation. I visited impressive private and public gardens, of which I wouldn't have been aware or have had access to on my own. I've learned a great

PresidentialMessage

deal by seeing conifers in such varied climates as Georgia and Tennessee, Iowa and Michigan. Certainly, a wide variety of conifers grow beautifully in my home state of Oregon, but I never would have appreciated the spectacularly beautiful form *Pinus cembra* had I not attended meetings in Ohio, Iowa and Michigan.

Our most recent meeting in Atlanta gave us a behind-the-scenes view of the conservation work at the Atlanta Botanical Garden, with rare and endangered tropical conifers. These unusual conifers from the genera *Podocarpus*, *Agathis*, *Dacrydium*, *Austrotaxus* and others were a foreign and exciting new world of conifers. We also saw a dizzying array of conifers in both Tom & Evelyn Cox's collection at the Cox Arboretum and Jody Karlin's creative Vista Garden. The immaculately maintained gardens at the Smith-Gilbert Garden are an inspiration for our own gardens, although I can't imagine when I'd find the time to make my garden look so nice.

I have served as a member of the Board of Directors for the Western region, vice president and president for that region, and more recently National Vice President/Treasurer, just prior to inheriting the presidency from Larry Nau.

At our most recent national Board of Directors meeting, the final one chaired by Larry, the Board unanimously approved the Scholarship Committee's recommended recipient for our annual \$2,500 student scholarship, Stephanie Kreig. She is pursuing an Honors Bachelor of Science Degree in Horticulture with Plant Breeding and Genetics Options at Oregon State University. The Committee received the largest number of applicants since the scholarship was established in 2005, and all were exceptionally well qualified. The Board discussed, and plans are being considered for, offering more than one scholarship in future years.

The Board also unanimously approved the Iseli Memorial Award Committee's recommended recipient, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond, Virginia, for the \$4,000 annual grant to a public garden or arboretum for the purchase of plants, or plant materials. The award is in honor of the memory of Jean Iseli.

In addition, Larry presented the Board with an opportunity to provide financial assistance to Joseph Pines Preserve, Sussex County, Virginia, for

the collection of additional seed of the endangered Virginia longleaf pine and to continue the reforestation of the 101 acre preserve. The Board approved Larry's request of a \$1,000 grant to the Preserve.

The Society provides a Regional Reference Garden Grant of \$3,000 for the support of a Reference Garden in each region annually on a rotating basis.

The Society also often provides grants to one or more of the gardens we visit during an annual meeting.

All the above mentioned grants and awards are paid from the national treasury, but the four regions also make grants to reference gardens.

All these awards and grants support the mission of our society, which states: "The mission of the American Conifer Society is the development, conservation and propagation of conifers, especially those [which] are dwarf or unusual, the standardization of nomenclature, and the education of the public."

I want to continue to look for more opportunities for the Society to financially support individuals, gardens and organizations whose efforts reflect our mission. I, as well as the other members of the Board, welcome your suggestions for worthy causes.

Our Society continues to offer a vibrant and informative website, the inspiring and educational *Conifer Quarterly*, support for beautiful gardens and opportunities for us all to have fun and learn at many regional and national gatherings. I greatly enjoy being a member of the American Conifer Society and am excited about the ongoing activities and the new initiatives being studied and developed by the Society. I hope you make the most of and enjoy the benefits the Society offers, as we all share in the endless fascination the world of conifers offers.

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Past President's Message

June 2014

By Larry Nau

As members of the American Conifer Society, we are all gardeners in some shape or form. As gardeners, we have experience in planting new conifers and creating new landscapes. We start with a vision, acquire the right materials, get help from our friends and work hard. Although the work is never complete, we eventually need to sit back and watch the fruits of our labor, as they develop and mature.

As I step down as your ACS President, I have followed much the same path as any dedicated gardener. Like all of my predecessors, we look for ways to grow and strengthen the American Conifer Society. During the last several years, we have seen the creation and implementation of our new website. The ACS website will become our primary way to educate future gardeners about conifers and unify the members of the ACS. Thank you to everyone who has contributed pictures, comments and articles to our site. Under the enthusiastic leadership of our new website editor, Sara Malone, I know our brightest days lie ahead. Outstanding additions continue to be carefully made to our conifer database, now under the leadership of Dave Olszyk. Over 50 % of our website "hits" go to the conifer database. Joe Carli successfully led our efforts to create a new logo, which has just been approved by the Board. Look for this new design to appear on the website, ACS publications and, of course, clothing!

Steve Courtney continues to excel in improving our main office functions. Each day more ACS members are using the new office software. We are pleased to report that over 50% of our 2014 National Meeting registrations were completed online using this software. Our membership continues to grow in part due to the ease of online signup, but also our energetic members holding rendezvous and creating various garden events. With Steve's help, ACS updates via email can take place in less than an hour; keeping our membership updated and informed.

The ACS owes much gratitude to John Ruter and the enthusiastic committee in Atlanta for providing an outstanding National Meeting. The gardens were remarkable and clearly demonstrated that conifers are alive

and **THRIVING** in the South! It was wonderful to visit 2 of our ACS Reference Gardens and see their outstanding conifers.

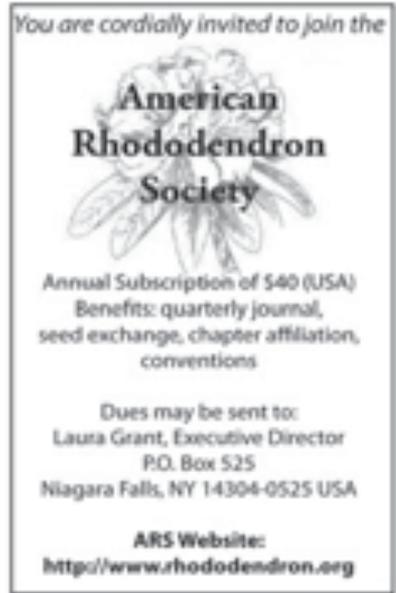
We have seen progress with a record number of applications for our scholarship program: 7 in 2014. Jerry Kral continues to do an excellent job in assisting our applicants. The ACS now has become a member of the Coalition of American Plant Societies. This affiliation will strengthen the ACS in the future. Lastly, the ACS has taken its first step toward conservation and preservation of conifers.

The ACS has made a donation of \$1,000 to assist in the propagation and planting of the Longleaf Pine (*Pinus palustris*) in Virginia. A complete report will follow in the Fall CQ.

Much of our progress and changes would not have been possible if it were not for your Board of Directors. Their recommendations, guidance and ultimately votes have been instrumental in directing the ACS into the future.

I admire the professionalism and the responsiveness of our CQ editor Ron Elardo in producing our marvelous publication. The *Conifer Quarterly* continues to be the most valued component of an ACS membership. There are so many people who have assisted the ACS during my tenure —“thank you” to each of you.

The ACS garden has some new additions, experienced some modifications and has been nurtured by many dedicated and caring members. As the head gardener, it is now time for me to step back and watch it grow. I welcome and support Brian Jacob as he takes on the task of reshaping the garden and guiding the ACS into the future. As we all realize, work in the garden is never done, and it's a labor of love. Thank you for your confidence and support during the past two years. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as your President and lead the American Conifer Society.





Cox Arboretum

2014 in Atlanta

WOW! If you were in Atlanta for the 2014 National Meeting, you know what that one syllable word means, and more.

By Ron Elardo

I have been going to national meetings only since 2008, but this one was one of the best. It had minimal “windshield time”, a relaxed pace, beautiful gardens, and delightful company. Add to that unique keynote presentations, and attendees enjoyed a super meeting. If you missed it, you missed a great time. If you were there, you have a memorable event to look back on with a smile of satisfaction. Hats off to the organizers, to John Ruter and Tom Cox!

There is something about the South. It is formal and yet easy-going. The ambience matches the sultry weather, which shone happily down upon us. Nature cooperated. The gardens were both welcoming and elegant. The Cox Arboretum opened its gates to reveal a well-planned and



Cox Arboretum



Taxodium distichum var. *imbricarium*.
Pond cypress, a 300+ year old plant
rescued from development.

multi-textured landscape. It was like entering a grotto, which, in turn, enclosed us. It is a treasure; so many conifer cultivars. I love the way the conifer beds slope up from the central path. You get the feeling that you are on a lowered stage, and that the central actors are on the main floor and balcony for you to see and appreciate. All the trees and plants were easily accessible and labelled. Our hosts were beckoning and comforting.

In similar fashion, the conifer collection at Smith-Gilbert, an ACS Conifer Reference Garden, was beautifully displayed.

Through winding beds, you had the sense that you were in an art gallery; each conifer being a painting in a winding lounge. Here we were able to see the plants up close and personal, just as we did at the Cox Arboretum.

Both private and public gardens change with every season and with every year. It can never be said that “I have been there and don’t need to go back.” It would be like saying that “I don’t need to visit the Louvre in Paris, France, again. I have been there already.” Great beauty and care can never be seen enough or taken for granted. As a student of literature and the arts, I have always seen another detail I missed before. That is the



Smith-Gilbert



Karlin's Garden



Karlin's Garden

greatness of admiring and learning from nature and human endeavor.

The third of our garden visits took us to the home and gardens of Jody and Kimberly Karlin. The Vista Garden is just that, a series of *vistas*.

The Karlin's have created, along with nature, garden beds which look like mini forested mountain ranges and valleys. Everywhere the eye looks, there are unique sights of color, texture and shape. The vistas could be miniaturized into rock gardens, but miniature they are not. Trees are banked up the slopes of the valley gorges so that all are clearly visible.

For me personally, Atlantic Botanic Garden brought me to a place Tom Cox introduced to me back at the Charlotte national meeting—container conifers. What a beautiful facility! Dancing waterfall topiaries and conservatories with container



Retrophyllum vitiensis

tropical conifers take the visitor to romantic and fantastical places. Fascinating were the tropical conifers. Their foliage goes from prickly and pinchie to feather-like. They are like large bonsai, totally dependent on human care. Atlanta Botanic is also an ACS Conifer Reference Garden.

As you all know, part of our mission as a Society is to educate the public on conifers. At each meeting, whether regional or national, speakers present last-to-the-minute information about conifers. Dr. Jason Smith, Associate Professor of Forest Pathology at the University of Florida, Gainesville, spoke to us about tree disease in *Torreya taxifolia*. Dr. Smith reported that, in the 1940's, *T. taxifolia* were very

common. The 1950's saw the beginnings of a rapid die-off of the plant. By the 1980's, only ca. 1,500 trees were extant. The culprit killing them is a fungus, *Fusarium torreyae*. *Ex situ* conservation is taking place at Atlanta Botanic. We learned that forest pathologists at Georgia Tech are investigating whether the pathogen is native or exotic. It is important to conserve the *Torreya taxifolia* since the subtropics and tropics have the greatest variety of conifers, and losing this species would be a tragedy.

The second presentation of the meeting occurred on Friday evening. Bill McNamara, Director of Quarryhill Botanical Garden, Glen Ellen, California, was the speaker. This was one of the most unique conifer presentations I have ever seen. We didn't just see trees. We saw the people and places where the special conifers were sought. We saw homes and villages and mountain ranges. Bill and his crew have scaled many a ridge and tree to gather seeds and specimens. They have braved administrators bent on keeping a certain conifer *in situ*, only to win them over and have a chance to see the protected conifer. It was a beautiful presentation



Araucaria muelleri

with screen on screen imagery, each projection being a triptych.

Two ACS members were recognized for their outstanding contributions. The Justin C. "Chub" Harper Award for Development in the Field of Conifers went to Derek Spicer, co-author of *Encyclopedia of Conifers*, which is a definitive research text on conifers. The Emelie and Marvin Snyder Award for Support of the American Conifer Society was awarded to Bill Barger, longtime donor of auction plants, propagator, auctioneer, website developer and administrator, and developer of the conifer database.

The auctions were as lively as could be. There was humor and even some screaming. Fun was had by all. I even heard that plans were being made to take conifers onboard aircraft so as to make the trek home. The auctions netted \$9,274. Congratulations to all the winners.

Coming to a national meeting should always be a show of support both for the Region, which hosts and sponsors it, and for the American Conifer Society. So, saddle up folks, we're headed west in 2015 and then back to the Great Lakes in 2016. See y'all there!

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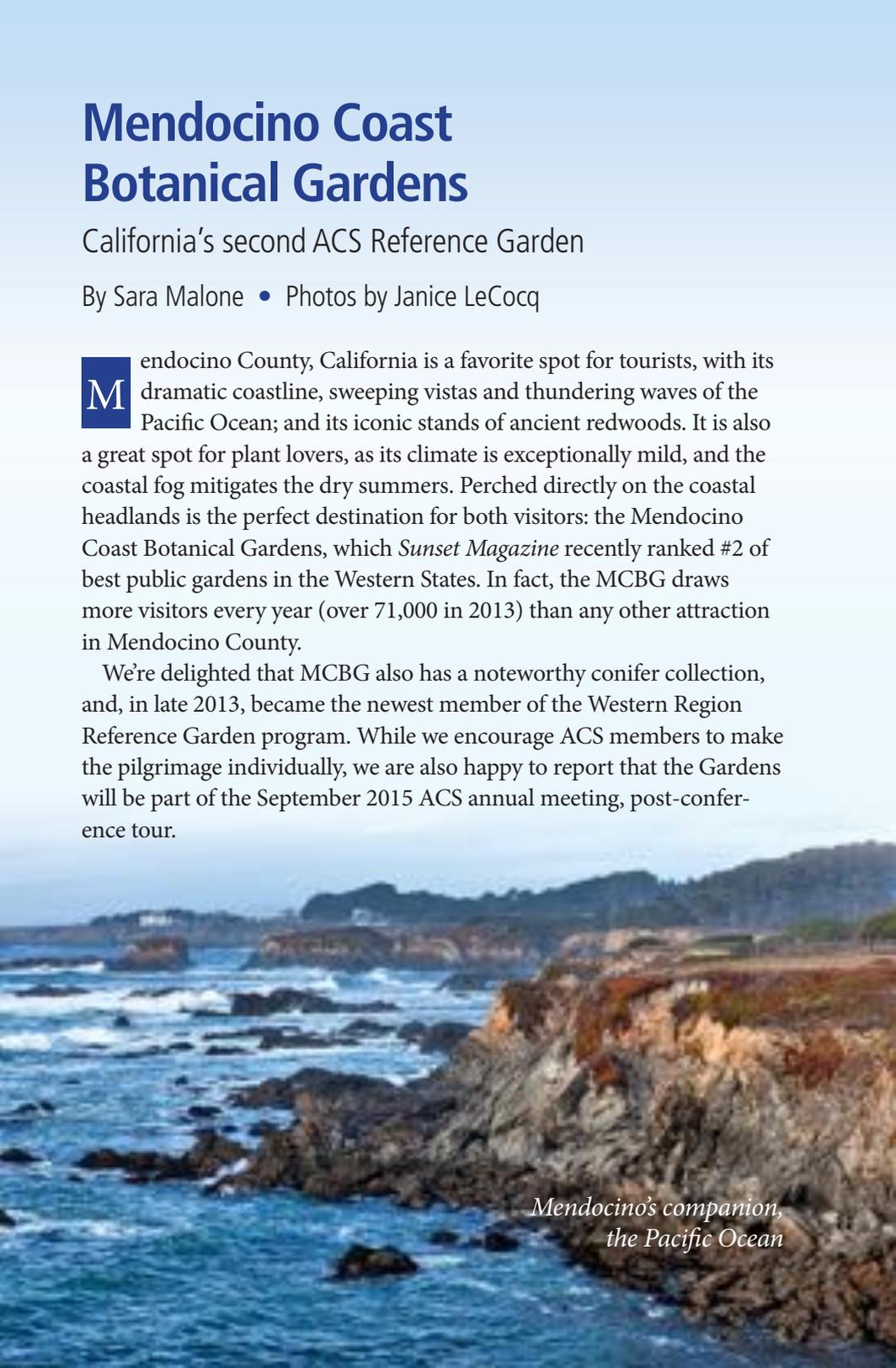
Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens

California's second ACS Reference Garden

By Sara Malone • Photos by Janice LeCocq

Mendocino County, California is a favorite spot for tourists, with its dramatic coastline, sweeping vistas and thundering waves of the Pacific Ocean; and its iconic stands of ancient redwoods. It is also a great spot for plant lovers, as its climate is exceptionally mild, and the coastal fog mitigates the dry summers. Perched directly on the coastal headlands is the perfect destination for both visitors: the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, which *Sunset Magazine* recently ranked #2 of best public gardens in the Western States. In fact, the MCBG draws more visitors every year (over 71,000 in 2013) than any other attraction in Mendocino County.

We're delighted that MCBG also has a noteworthy conifer collection, and, in late 2013, became the newest member of the Western Region Reference Garden program. While we encourage ACS members to make the pilgrimage individually, we are also happy to report that the Gardens will be part of the September 2015 ACS annual meeting, post-conference tour.



*Mendocino's companion,
the Pacific Ocean*



The Gardens were founded in 1961 by retired nurseryman Ernest Schoefer and his wife, Betty. Attracted initially to the site by its beauty and mild weather, he was also impressed with its ample water supply and acid soil, which provided the perfect conditions for his beloved *Rhododendron*. In fact, the Gardens' first notable collection was *Rhododendron*, reflecting both the unique growing conditions and a resident population of horticulturalists engaged in hybridizing many of the most popular early introductions. Today the MCBG is still known for its extensive collection of these beautiful shrubs and it is one of the few places in the world where every kind of *Rhododendron* can be grown, including many tender species from the cloud forests of Southeast Asia and the Himalayas. Some of these unusual specimens produce the most fragrant blossoms in the Gardens. Every May the MCBG and the Noyo Chapter of the American *Rhododendron* Society host the largest *Rhododendron* show in California, when the majority of the shrubs are in glorious bloom.

Conifers were also part of the MCBG from its beginnings, as the native stands of *Pinus contorta* (shore pine) provide a crucial windbreak to the Gardens from the prevailing westerlies off the ocean. The first efforts involved replenishing and adding to those trees along the shoreline. There were keen conifer enthusiasts among the early supporters, such

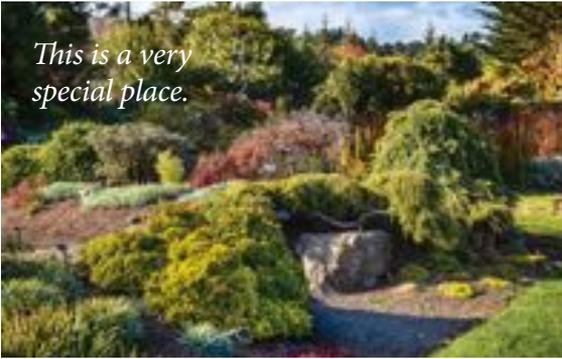
as Peter Shick, who established a relationship with John Silva, a conifer expert and botanist in New York. Silva sent scions of rare conifer species to the Gardens, where they flourish today. Shick also collected from the wild and used other contacts to introduce interesting species of conifers from throughout the world, especially from New Zealand and Tasmania, which share the Gardens' mild, Mediterranean climate.

Today, the Gardens' total 47 acres and the conifer collection includes natives, rare and unusual species from the world's temperate regions, and also interesting dwarf and miniature cultivars which are both planted in conifer-centric beds and inter-planted with perennials and other woody plants. About 50% of the Gardens is maintained in its natural state, which affords visitors the opportunity to experience both carefully cultivated plantings and the scenic woodland with towering native trees and lush undergrowth. These 'wild' areas are managed to protect both native flora and fauna.

The noteworthy conifer species in the MCBG collection come from all over the world, and many are now endangered in the wild. The *Dacrydium cupressinum*, endemic to New Zealand, is probably the one, about which most visitors ask, due to its impressive size and unusual aspect. There are some low *Abies fabri* specimens, unusual in that this species usually has a tall upright habit, and two of the three at MCBG are



*Mature trees blend
with the new.*



This is a very special place.

prostrate. Faber's fir is endemic to China's Sichuan Province, and its decreasing population makes it vulnerable in the wild. The Gardens boast a particularly fine *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, an

Athrotaxis selaginoides and a spectacular *Abies pinsapo* var. *marocana*.

There are future plans for expanding and enhancing the Gardens' collection of dwarf and miniature conifer cultivars. Director Mary Anne Payne is an ACS member and a long-time fan: "Conifers provide winter interest in our perennial beds and year-round curb appeal in our problem entry area, which is open to deer, exposed to the reflected heat of the parking lot and is extremely windy. The conifers take the abuse and still look great!" Mary Anne notes that the entry beds are currently being renovated, with additions from her purchases at last year's Western Region Annual Meeting in Olympia, Washington. Not only did she acquire some great plants at the auction, but also took the opportunity to drive up and back to the meeting, stopping at conifer nurseries in Oregon on her return and adding to her haul. "Our goal is to make the entry garden reflect the Gardens' overall collection, as this is the first bed that our visitors see when they arrive, and it's a great introduction

to these wonderful plants." There are also plans to add pathways and conifer cultivars to the North Forest. The Nursery at the MCBG sells a large diverse selection of dwarf and miniature cultivars, many of



Where native greets the visitor.

which can be seen planted in the various gardens.

In addition to the rhododendrons and conifers, the Gardens have significant collections of heaths and heathers, camel-

lias, magnolias and native upland and riparian plants of the north coast. The heaths and heathers collection is recognized by the American Public Gardens Association. There is also an astoundingly colorful dahlia display in autumn.

The MCBG is an extraordinarily vibrant garden, with a strong connection to its community. The large numbers of visitors are easily accommodated in its ample acreage, and it never feels crowded. Its dog- and child-friendly policies mean that, on sunny days, the grounds are peopled with families picnicking and enjoying the beautiful surroundings. This is not by accident; it is a considered part of the Gardens' mission. As Payne says: "We connect people with nature; we're more than just a display garden. There's something for everyone here and the Gardens can be a place of either excitement or solace, depending on what you come looking for." A signature annual event of the Gardens, December's Festival of Lights, is a family-oriented evening when thousands of lights transform the Gardens into a winter wonderland. The spring brings the magnolias and rhododendrons into bloom; the summer the peak of the perennial borders, and the fall and winter the dahlias, heathers and heaths. Throughout the cycle, as backdrop, companions and sometimes scene-stealers, the conifers, endure and flourish. Come visit for yourself—you won't be disappointed!





Inaugurating a Reference Garden: Conifer Day at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens

By Sara Malone

When the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens (MCBG) became the newest ACS Reference Garden, Director Mary Anne Payne decided to celebrate in style. Declaring May 3, 2014 to be “Conifer Day”, Mary Anne, with the help of the Garden’s staff, volunteers, Master Gardeners and the ACS, put on a full day of coniferous activity which drew attendees from all over the Western Region.

Brent Markus of Conifer Kingdom/Rare Tree Nursery made room in his bi-coastal calendar and headlined the event as keynote speaker. He gave a presentation on how to use conifers in the landscape and a survey of what was newest and most exciting in the world of cultivars to standing-room-only crowds. The audience ranged from seasoned coneheads to the newest of newbies, and everyone had the fever. To

illustrate and highlight his presentations, Brent drew on some of the hundreds of plants he had shipped down from his nursery in Oregon to sell to attendees. A veritable feeding-frenzy ensued every time there was a break in the presentations. (This author confesses to playing her part—I went home with a fabulous *Ginkgo biloba* ‘Weeping Wonder’ and a *Pinus banksiana* ‘Manomet’, among others.) The fact that Brent offered discounts on multiple plant purchases only fueled the fire! In addition to the plants from Conifer Kingdom, there were unusual offerings from specialty *Rhododendron* and *Camellia* nurseries.

The rhododendrons, for which the Gardens are justly famous, were in bloom, so that we were broadminded and viewed angiosperms as well as conifers. In mid-May, the MCBG hosts the largest *Rhododendron* show in California, and Mary Anne timed Conifer Day to coincide with peak bloom. *Rhododendron*, and conifer tours were offered throughout the day, led by MCBG docents and gardeners. When not attending presentations, buying plants, or touring, we viewed some of Bob Shimon’s famous bonsai specimens, including a dramatic redwood and a pygmy cypress.

Most of the day’s activities were open to all comers, but the afternoon featured an ACS-members-only tour of the Gardens at Harmony Woods, the special world of ACS members Judy and Bob Mathey. This author gave an introduction to conifers called “Enter the Cone Zone” to those remaining at the MCBG, and, once again, Brent’s plants were put to use as I was able to pull specimens from their pots, demonstrate root growth, and explain proper planting and care. New members signed up on the spot!

The day’s schedule also included the formal presentation of the Reference Garden plaque to the Gardens, comments by ACS and MCBG officers and directors, and a talk on the state of the coastal forests by Greg Giusti, a specialist in forest and wildland ecology and the Lake and Mendocino County Advisor for the University of California Cooperative Extension Program.

When the group returned from Harmony Woods, wine, beer and hors d’oeuvres were waiting and, thus fortified, they set out for an after-hours tour of the Gardens’ conifer collection with Walt Valen and Siena MacFarland. Walt, an MCBG Garden Advisory Committee and Board member, was the Executive Director of Strybing Arboretum (now San

Francisco Botanical Garden) for 20 years and is an avid plant enthusiast. (Note: those of you who join us for the 2015 Western Regional Meeting Post-tour will be visiting his garden, Stoney Bottom, as well as the MCBG.) Siena, one of the staff gardeners at the MCBG, has a particular affection for the conifers and together, Walt and Siena gave us a fun and fact-filled tour. It always feels special to wander in a public place after-hours, especially with refreshment in hand, against the backdrop of the sun slowly sinking into the Pacific.

The day's festivities were capped with a dinner under the tent on the MCBG grounds. Catered by a Mendocino chef with a nod to the audience, the menu included salad with pine nuts and cakes with cone decorations. (It turns out that a previously unappreciated aspect of cones is that, when rendered in icing, they are chocolate.) The tables were decorated with coniferous arrangements, some of which stumped the experts, who, when trying to ID them, failed to notice that the arrangers had glued cones from one genus onto the branches of another!

This marvelous event brought together the most passionate cone-heads from across the Western Region, introduced many of them to the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, educated, enlightened and entertained all who attended, and sent many of us home with choice additions to our collections. In addition, we made conifer converts out of many who had not yet entered "the cone zone". Brent graciously consulted with the MCBG on the planned expansion of their dwarf conifer collection, insuring that the Gardens will be an active ACS Reference Garden in the future. A smaller band of die-hards continued on the next day, for a train ride through the redwood forests and a visit to Walt Valen's Stoney Bottom Garden in Boonville, California.

If you live near or are involved with an ACS Reference Garden, and you haven't collaborated on an event like this, why not? And, if you're involved in managing an ACS Reference Garden, seek out some ACS members to help you put on an event! Collaborating with our Reference Gardens, other plant societies and organizations such as the Master Gardeners; it is a great way to entertain, educate and attract new members. Using volunteers across the organizations, we keep costs low and provide rich, informative programming. Our Reference Gardens provide great venues and wonderful teaching opportunities, and together we can have fun while carrying out the mission of the ACS.

SAVE THE DATE

for the 2015 National Meeting!

Place: Sonoma and Mendocino Counties, CA
(San Francisco Bay Area)

Dates: September 10–12, meeting,
September 13–15 post-meeting tour

Join the Western Region in lovely Sonoma County for the 2015 National Meeting.

We'll be staying at the DoubleTree Hotel and visiting fabulous private gardens (two of which have been featured in *Fine Gardening* magazine) and going behind the scenes at some iconic public spaces. Professor Stephen Sillett, a world authority on redwood canopy ecology, will be our keynote speaker (read about him in Richard Preston's *The Wild Trees*). In addition to the garden visits, we're planning a cowboy barbecue at a working horse ranch, a Mexican fiesta, and lunch in an old growth redwood forest.

For those who continue on to Mendocino, we'll feature optional zip lining in the redwood canopy, more fabulous gardens along the mild Zone 10 seacoast, and the spectacular scenery of the California North Coast. Our base will be the Little River Inn in Little River, CA.

As an added incentive, it looks like about 30 members of the Dutch and British Conifer Societies will join us!

Hope that you can join us! For more information, email or call Sara Malone or Joe Carli.

Sara: webeditor@conifersociety.org, 707-486-0444

Joe: acswestern@gmail.com, 503-928-9141

The ACS Conifer Database Needs YOUR help!

By David Olszyk

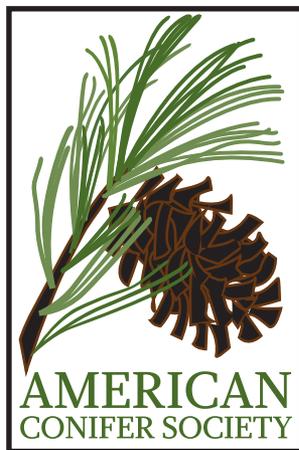
One of the great things about our society is that it's collectively the greatest wealth of conifer knowledge anywhere.

As our new website continues to evolve and take shape, I'd like to remind you of one of the most powerful features available to you, the conifer expert—the fact that our website is designed to be socially interactive through use of commenting and that includes the conifer database.

Simply click on the link which says conifers in the top right hand corner of our website and it will take you to the front page of the database. Use the drop-down menus to find a cultivar which interests you, or simply browse. If you find a record that's lacking in detail, leave a comment and that record will be flagged for editing. No pictures? Is a nice example lurking in your personal collection? Snap a picture and upload it by clicking on the plus-sign to the right of the thumbnails.

As the title says, I need your help. Our database contains nearly 10,000 records, many needing accurate descriptions and their histories told. Further, there are thousands more conifer cultivars which are not yet entered into the database. If something's missing and you know the story behind the plant let me know and I'll create a new record allowing us to "complete the record." Simply email me at david.olszyk@gmail.com and I'll begin the process. I am particularly interested in hearing from the people who discovered or created the cultivars we all know and love.

The key is to work together like the family we are. By doing so, the American Conifer Society will have established a world-class resource for conifer knowledge respected by Coneheads world-wide.



An Email to the Editor:

Words of Encouragement For All Conifer-lovers

By John Jacob Vrablic

Hello Ron,

I suppose even the most timid conifer aficionados and devotees in our camaraderie of shared interests were lured into the perils of zone envy before the jet stream buckled and flooded us with a deep layer of cold out of the Arctic for about six months. It came too soon and lasted too long; sublime torture ; most widespread in decades. I am also a victim of zonal denial. We can't be afraid to make mistakes. If we are fool enough to have a big garden, we must take the consequences. It's not a matter of how cold it got, but rather how it got

cold. We now fully appreciate the sheer relentlessness of winter, along with angry memories of our bones. The discoloration on the conifers was dramatic and wreaked havoc. Some years a frost will ruin the fun. Conifers are more fragile than we imagine; kind of puts one in a shovel-prune-mode, which takes your breath away. Loving a tree is simply not enough. One must never assume all is well. Our conifers may be slow to recover; the winter may have exceeded what a few species could survive. Growing conifers is simple, choosing which ones work is tricky. Bad winters and summers have a way of thinning the collection. The



Pinus thunbergiana 'Thunder Head'



Picea abies 'Cupressina'

cognoscenti, who broke us out of our hardiness zones, got slam-dunked this time around. You just don't plant an arboretum and walk away. Conifers have more quirks than you can imagine; they are less predictable than you might wish. I must confess that I endured a sense of deodar cedar shock. We have a brutal climate, not temperate, more harsh. The wind and cold boned me to the core. Hard to fight off the drying effects of sun and wind all winter long. A real challenge to find a garden tableau of diverse conifers to create a pleasing garden with year round interest in a very harsh climate. Each conifer is different and distinctive; growth is not

predetermined or predestined. Conifers have their own immortal feel. Weather may be far from what may be considered normal. Every garden has a special journey. We overcome our ignorance with energy and devotion. I've stayed put long enough to outgrow my early mishaps; my garden has evolved as it has gone along. I'm not out for the cheap thrill. Driving around the same cul-de-sac like the Neanderthals who can't put aside their conifer prejudices and come out of the conifer closet. One conifer leads to another. If I see something I like, I'll find a place for it. Just put the right conifer in the right place. Infinite diversity in infinite combinations. Satisfaction is mirrored in the eyes. Fulfillment is more profound. It is mirrored in the spirit. You are not really a gardener until you can fully appreciate conifers. Once the bug bites, there's nothing else like it. It's the seriously cool new growth which keeps me smiling. I can hardly wait to begin planting new conifers. The perfect dwarf is out there somewhere.

Hurray for Weeds!

By Don Durkee • Photos by Sam Durkee

I used to be the one in my urban neighborhood with perfect grass, perfect trees, perfect flowers. A yard people envied. A yard people traveled to just to enjoy beauty in its endemic perfection. Yes, I'm exaggerating. But that is how I felt about the yard. It was gorgeous.

Then I moved to the south coast of Oregon onto five acres of woodland a mile and a half from a paved road. I cleared one acre at first, and that has since expanded to about three acres in the last fourteen years. I used all my urban wisdom in designing and planting and maintaining. Perfection everywhere I looked. Yes, it was in my genes. Durkee was on a roll.

Then, nature hit with a vengeance. Not storms or snow or Godzilla or tsunami. No, it was the deer and the occasional porcupine. They ate my trees, my flowers, my vegetables, my perfect grass. So, I started putting up fences. Dozens of high fences to thwart their destruction. Since you can't see my property from the gravel road, I had to please only myself. But I wasn't pleased at all. It might just as well have been a prison compound. So, I took down all the fences and started over. Ignoring deer repellents and most deer resistant plants, I decided to live in harmony with nature. I know that sounds un-American, but what can I say.





I also decided to stop using herbicides. That was the most difficult. The sight of dandelions in the yard always makes me feel slothful, unworthy even. They seem to beg to be pulled out and stamped on or simply poisoned to death. And, I was the urban master of all these tasks. But the bees loved them. And, their taproots did bring nutrients to the surface, through layers of hardpan sand left by a million years of tsunamis in this area. So, I said yes to dandelions. Yes, to weeds.

I was in transition. I felt very uncomfortable, consciously adapting my mind to a different set of values.

I planted over two hundred varieties of conifers. Not because I especially liked conifers. At least, not in the beginning. Initially, I just wanted to fight the monoculture on the coast. Driving mile after mile past stands of Douglas fir, suitable





for logging, but out of harmony with the diversity I expected to see in nature. I wasn't interested in dwarfs or miniatures. I doubt I even knew they existed. So, I planted what would become "big" ones. Too many, too close together, and surrounded by weeds and tall grasses. A sight to drive any urban soul absolutely nuts. Which, I admit, was part of the attraction.

Today I spread nearly a ton of birdseed on the grounds each year. I welcome dozens of deer which munch on my Swiss chard, my roses, my lilies, even on my rhubarb leaves, which are supposed to be poisonous. I watch the hawks swoop down and eat the quail, and I cringe. But that is also part of nature.

The next step in this transitional phase is to stop mowing my lawn, though I may not have the nerve. I want to turn the property into a meadow of sorts. I found a website which sells seeds adapted for browsing animals. I'm going to buy multiple pounds of the stuff. And then what? Well, I've got to teach myself to love the weeds.

A Return to Rochester

“Legacy”

Elmer Dustman

Rochester, New York received the nickname “Flower City” in 1860, at which time over 2,000 acres were devoted to the production of nursery stock and seed production. Hundreds of growers produced fruit, ornamental and evergreen trees plus perennials and annuals. The Ellwanger & Barry Nursery, established in 1840, became the largest in the nation, gaining national recognition for developing the trade. Wholesale distributors were established and stock was shipped by Erie Canal, rail and mail order throughout the country.

Frederick Law Olmsted designed the jewel of the Arboreta Park System, Highland Park, using donated nursery land. Highland Park was just the beginning for Olmsted’s vision of a park system for Rochester, which he called an “emerald necklace” of parks and gardens along the Genesee River, the Erie Canal and Lake Ontario. He went on to design Genesee Valley Park, Seneca Park and Maplewood Park, along with several small city parks sprinkled throughout Rochester.



Highland Park

The Arboreta Park System became a testing ground for woody plants from China via the Harvard Arnold Arboretum. Mature and rare specimens of many of these plants can be seen in these parks. The Rochester Park System also distributed thousands of seeds, trees, shrubs, scions, and cuttings to botanical and horticultural institutions throughout the USA and many other nations. The largest institutional distribution was a 10,000-pound shipment of seeds and small plants to the Royal Botanic Garden at Kew, New London, England in 1931.

Highland Park, besides boasting the Olmstead design, is also a National Historical Landmark. Let me take you on a virtual tour, which begins on Pinetum Drive. This curving hill road creates a feeling that one is traveling through a wooded canyon in mountain country. Only trees are visible and this creates both mystery and suspense.



Huge conifer specimens, firmly anchored in the hillsides, loom over the road. You mentally ID them as having a special “look”. Is this due to age, rarity or an unusual cultivar not to be found today? Some have provenance through annual consignments from Arnold Arboretum, starting in 1902. Highland Park was the place of choice to try collected botanicals from Western China by plant explorer and collector Ernest H. Wilson. The collection has some of the oldest dawn redwoods,

Metasequoia glyptostroboides, to be found in the states raised from the six seeds, received from the Arnold in 1946.

According to Kent Milham, probably the best resource person in the Park's department; "Looking at the card catalog and in the BG-BASE, the dawn redwood at the corner of Highland and Goodman was received in 1948 from the Arnold Arboretum as a plant. The seed was germinated on 2/22/1948, and seed was originally sent to the US by the University of Nanking (China)."



One of the original dawn redwoods from Arnold Arboretum by Elmer Dustman



Zinc label by Elmer Dustman

I enjoy reading the old zinc tree tags, which show more provenance information than the currently used aluminum tags. It is also surprising that these tags have labeled these trees for over a hundred years.

Some examples of this information on my favorite trees;

- Chinese white pine *Pinus armandi* 352 Arnold Arboretum 1905-1911
- Black pine *Pinus nigra* 'Hornibrookiana' Highland Park propagated WB
- Glehn's spruce *Picea glehnii* 449 Arnold Arboretum 1900-02

A few years ago Jerry Kral and I gave a tour of the Highland Pinetum for the local Master Gardeners. We discovered almost a hundred trees

over a hundred years old! This horticultural tradition is now partly carried on in the landscape by American Conifer Society members. You will have a unique opportunity to enjoy their gardens and enjoy a personal tour of Highland Park's unique Pinetum.

David Swinford

We purchased the property in 2001. The historic mansion was built in 1925 and eventually became known as the Strong Mansion, where Margaret Woodbury Strong lived until her death in 1969. In the early 1940s, Fletcher Steele designed and built large curving walls and an intimate garden on the north-

east side of the house. Fletcher Steele is best known for designing the Blue Steps at Naumkeag, located in Stockton, Massachusetts. However, as a Rochester resident, he designed many private gardens in the Rochester area, the Strong Mansion being one.

The mansion required almost six years of renovation, and it wasn't until 2007 that we could turn our attention to the largely neglected gardens and landscape. Beginning in 2008, we have done extensive tree work, built new staircases and added an herb garden at the front entrance. Hedges and several hundred shrubs, along with new perennial beds and a terraced conifer garden, restored some of the landscape. At least one new planting bed is being added every year. Much needs to be done, including the rehabilitation of the Fletcher Steele additions.

The property includes a venerable Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum* var. *dissectum*) planted ca. 1941 and Steele's line of Norway spruce (*Picea abies* sp.) pollarded at four meters for many years. Steele's hedge is currently in two, 150-foot sections and has a 100-foot opening in the center



A small section of the Fletcher Steele wall at the Strong Mansion...the perfect display feature for conifer dwarfs and miniatures.

to allow access and a view of the lower lawns.

A yew hedge (*Taxus baccata*) feeds the deer which roam between two adjacent golf courses. Lots of wildlife, including woodchucks, foxes, coyote, wild turkey, and the world's largest population of hungry chipmunks populate the property.



*Snake branch Norway spruce (*Picea abies* 'Cranstonii').*

Photo by Karen Kral



A view showing the influence of pollarding on Fletcher Steele's Norway spruce hedge.

Photo Karen Kral

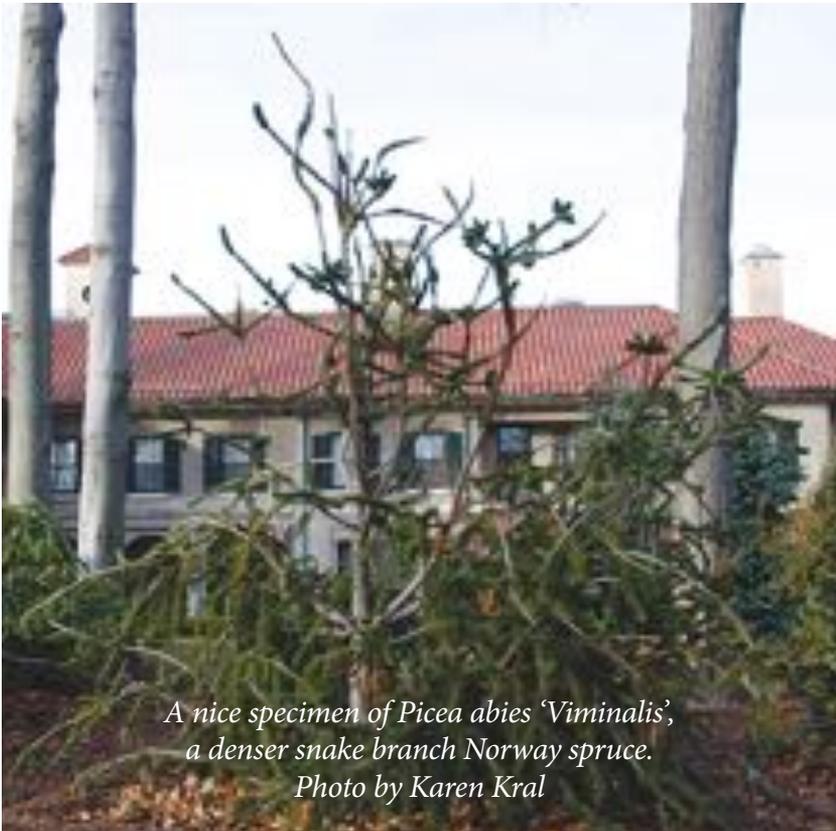
New plantings demonstrate that I am more a conifer collector than gardener. As a result, the emphasis is on foliage color and texture rather than flowers.

Most visitors, not blessed with Addictive Conifer Syndrome (ACS), accuse us of dragging malformed plants out of dumpsters rather than searching nationwide for unusual specimens. More gratifying are visitor comments that they never realized the variety of shapes, sizes, colors, and textures

conifers provide.

Among my favorite conifers are *Picea abies* 'Cranstonii'. Al Pfeiffer of Oriental Garden Supply had this in his exhibit at Rochester's Gardenscape in 2009. I bought it immediately, having fallen in love with its sparse, snakelike branches. The cultivar was originally grown from seed c. 1840 at Cranston Nursery in Hereford, England.

Another favorite is *Picea abies* 'Viminalis'. This is an uncommon, but very old snake branch spruce. It is a much fuller plant than 'Cranstonii', and the branches can be very contorted, resulting in an open, but overall graceful appearance. I purchased my specimen from Oriental Garden Supply in 2013; they got it from a farm in Ohio. The cultivar originated as a plant found in the wild in 1741 by Clas Alstromer near Stockholm, Sweden.



*A nice specimen of Picea abies 'Viminalis',
a denser snake branch Norway spruce.
Photo by Karen Kral*



Eastern white pine (Pinus strobus 'Pendula'), a treasure from Ken

Eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus* 'Pendula') is another favorite. I forget who said that three of these in the same garden are an abomination, but I thought of it as I planted my third this past fall. This specimen forms the entry arch for a pathway between two newly planted conifer beds. It came from a neglected corner of one of Ken Franke's Christmas tree farms and joins the other two planted in 2008. It was first recorded by Nelson in 1866.

The gardens currently display over 350 conifer cultivars in several beds installed since 2008. Many of these plants are specimen grade, giving newly planted beds a more balanced and mature appearance. Although the property has many mature trees, and we moved a number of plants from our previous home in Connecticut, this garden is still very young and very much a work in progress. Thoughtful comments, critiques, suggestions and helpful hints from all visitors are welcome. We are still learning and have killed our share of plants. We try to remove them before people visit, but don't always succeed.



*Photos of the Swinford
garden features by
Elmer Dustman*



EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the last of the *RETURN TO ROCHESTER* series. Rochester is pleased to host the Northeast Region of the American Conifer Society on September 19–21, 2014. Registration is still open and details can be found on the ACS website.



Saving the Arborvitae, Pt. 2

By Jennifer Watson

Two winters ago, an ice storm wreaked havoc on my thirty-foot arborvitae hedge (Winter CQ, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 17–21) *Thuja occidentalis* ‘Nigra’ (Eastern white cedar). The arborvitae touched the ground after the storm. I cut six feet off the tops to give them a chance at righting themselves. Since then, during every winter storm, I brushed the snow off trunks and branches.

I pushed the leaning trunks as high as possible and placed 2x4s under them to give the trees more stability in the wind. As the trees became more able to hold themselves up, I moved the 2x4s back along the trunks toward where the trees enter the ground. Most of the trees are almost totally straight; however, the largest one, the roots of which pulled up from the ground, still slants.

One day in the spring, I looked out the window to see a pair of fawn nibbling daintily on the lower branches of an arborvitae. Oh no! I grabbed my coat, ran out the door and started across the lawn. What was I going to do? Protect the arborvitae, of course! Then the *cervi* saw me and spooked: turned, ran and hopped the fence to disappear into the woods.





I hoped these visits were not going to be a regular occurrence. I've heard that soap, Irish Spring or Ivory, hung on stakes, is a deterrent for deer. Reports of green nylon net fence staked close to the shrubs sound convincing. Luckily, the deer have not returned. Perhaps the wetlands an acre away are more attractive to them. I'm keeping my fingers crossed.

After topping my trees, I will never have the world's tallest arborvitae. They grow on South Manitou Island in Michigan (34 m tall and 175 cm in diameter). But the trees have filled in and look healthier. They are beautiful and their resiliency is miraculous. They are absolutely worth saving. Following are some scenes of the arborvitae from last winter.





CAPS Delegates

CAPS Summary

By Larry Nau

The American Conifer Society attended its first Coalition of American Plant Societies (CAPS) meeting on May 14–16, 2014. CAPS provides an opportunity for participating plants societies to meet, discuss common issues and share past experiences. It also provides an excellent forum to share successful ideas and strategies for the future. The 2014 meeting was hosted by the American Horticultural Society at the Hill Farm in Alexandria, Virginia. ACS President Larry Nau represented the American Conifer Society at this meeting.

The highlights of the meeting included presentations by Holly Shimizu, Executive Director, United States Botanical Garden, “Cultivating the Passion for Plants” and Kelly Norris, Horticultural Manager, Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden, “*Growing Relevance: The Future of Plant Societies in American Horticulture*”. In addition six “Best Practices Forums” were held by various attending Societies. Larry used a power point presentation to introduce the development of the new ACS website and its current status. The CAPS attendees were also interested in the ACS’s experience with our new office software, Neon. The group had the opportunity to tour the gardens at the Hill Farm and the gardens of George Washington’s Mount Vernon Estate.

Critical issues which are common among the participating societies are decreasing membership, decreasing revenue streams, and how to engage the next generation of gardeners. Topics also included the possibility of joint meetings/events, shared administrators and common office space. Kelly Norris emphasized the mission of education of the public-at-large by public gardens. He went on to illustrate how American plant societies have a role in this mission and need to partner with public gardens. Clearly the Iseli Award and the ACS Reference Garden program are two prime examples of how the ACS assists public gardens. ACS members have a long, rich tradition of personally assisting, advising and donating to various public gardens as well.

Societies in attendance:

African Violet Society of America	American Orchid Society
American Camellia Society	American Rhododendron Society
American Conifer Society	American Rose Society
American Daffodil Society	Herb Society of America
American Dahlia Society	National Chrysanthemum Society
American Iris Society	

Also in attendance:

American Horticultural Society
Garden Writers of America



Mt. Vernon



The gardens at Mt. Vernon.

The 2015 CAPS meeting will be in Kirtland, Ohio, at the headquarters of the Herb Society of America.

George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate features two significant conifers. The first is a towering Canadian hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*), which was given as a gift to George Washington by the Governor of New York State, DeWitt Clinton, in 1791. It is just one of three trees which have been verified as being from Washington's era. The second tree is on the back lawn of Mount Vernon near the Potomac River. This Atlantic blue cedar (*Cedrus atlantica* 'Glauca') was planted to commemorate the life of Pamela Cunningham, who led the effort to restore and preserve Mount Vernon.

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The Answer Guy

Chris Daeger, Rowe Arboretum

Joan of Seattle, Washington area writes:

Are you available to answer a question for me specific to conifers? I am trying to do my research before buying trees, and I'm having a hard time finding some specific info on species. Can you give me a list of conifers to look at which meet the criteria: fast growing, width 15' or less, must be able to be pruned and still look good, tall (at least 20' or more), tolerate winter cold temps around 30F (at night) with occasional drops to 10F (rare) (we live in the Seattle, Washington area)? I am looking for some plants which will work as a screen and grow in quickly and beautifully. If you give me a list of names, I can research them further. I have looked at Lawson's cypress, 'Green Giant' and Leyland cypress.



Thuja occidentalis 'Degroot's Spire'

Chris answered:

First off, I am jealous of your situation. I wish I could have the climate you work with. I visited out there three years ago, and I know I could grow many, many things.

Anyway, from what I can gather from your note, you are looking for conifers which are narrow and columnar in nature. Just about all conifer species have a fastigiata or columnar variety in their repertoire. Many can be found with the cultivar 'Fastigiata' or something similarly spelled already listed. All have upright branching versus the usual horizontal branching habit typical of most species. Try these on for size:

- *Pinus strobus*/*Pinus strobus* 'Fastigiata'
- *Juniperus* species and cultivars
- *Pseudotsuga menziesii* 'Fastigiata'
- *Picea abies* 'Cupressina'
- *Chamaecyparis pisifera* cultivars
- *Cupressus* species
- *Taxus* varieties
- *Thuja occidentalis* / *picata* species, both have some narrow forms

These should suffice to get you started. You should have some fun researching all the possibilities, and they all will perform for you in your location. Good luck.



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Newbie Pruning

By M. M. Donaldson

Do you ever wonder who was allowed and why they were allowed to prune a tree or shrub? Then do you wonder if that same person would be allowed to cut someone's hair?

Just as one learns to cut hair well, it takes instruction and lots of practice to maintain a tidy look and style to landscape trees and shrubs. Pruning conifers requires a bit more awareness, as they can be less forgiving when done incorrectly.

Before approaching a landscape tree or shrub with something sharp in hand, it is important first to be truthful about one's knowledge and skills. The fear of doing something wrong is a good caution, but should not be a reason to do nothing.

"That is how things get way out of shape and out of bounds," said

Wayne Strayer, from Hidden Lake Gardens, located in Tipton, Michigan. He has spent the last three years of his 35 years in the green-industry, working on the Harper Collection of Dwarf and Rare Conifers. “Most people don’t prune because of fear.”

Pruning the plant when it has broken branches, disease, reversions or has become too big, are the most common reasons. In all circumstances, prune with a purpose in mind. With specimens, there is one main reason for pruning which can also be utilized with any planting in the home landscape.

“Maintain the shape of the plant,” said Jim Chamberlain, who has spent the last five seasons working in the Harper Collection at HLG.

“I felt like I had been asked to watch over a celebrity,” Chamberlain said, recalling back to when he was given the responsibility of working in the Harper.

Initially, he was intimidated, but asked a lot of questions before doing anything. It took time to build his confidence up to where, Chamberlin very modestly explained, he can provide input on Harper maintenance. His goal is to prune so that “nobody knows we were there.”

This author’s personal primer has been Adrian Bloom’s book, *Gardening With Conifers*, which devotes a section to pruning and shaping conifers. Other books on pruning are available for purchase or checking out at a local library. Caution is advised that some of these books may not be as detailed for someone who is trying to DIY, or may find the material is geared more toward professionals.

For those who are inclined to learn visually, the site, <http://tinyurl.com/k2kgnc7> is recommended.

The website offers links to videos with step by step directions, showing the finer nuances of pruning. Additionally there are articles which supplement the videos, both featuring Bert Cregg, Associate Professor of Horticulture at Michigan State University.

Cregg gives clear and understandable directions on why to prune, when to prune and how to prune.

Control pruning is important to do with plantings in the first couple of decades. Strayer stated that he sees so many trees which have to be removed when they get too big. By being proactive instead of reactive, pruning can be used to prevent problems.

Chamberlain agreed, and added that getting to know the personality

“As members of the American Conifer Society, we are all gardeners in some shape or form. As gardeners, we have experience in planting new conifers and creating new landscapes. We start with a vision, acquire the right materials, get help from our friends and work hard. Although the work is never complete, we eventually need to sit back and watch the fruits of our labor, as they develop and mature.” – Larry Nau

of a tree or shrub is important. Chamberlain described how some can be pushy to their neighbors or “namby-pamby”, his term for needy.

By combining the knowledge of controlled pruning and plant habit, specimen plantings will most likely have a longer life.

“If they had been pruned years back,” Chamberlain said, “they could have stayed, but they were making dead spots on their neighbor.”

More advice for the newbie is using the right tool and maintaining them.

“Hedge clippers,” Strayer said, shaking his head and putting his arms up defensively, “Hands off.”

For professionals and the obsessed, bypass pruners are key in making clean cuts with live stems or branches. The blade is able to pass by the guide, creating cuts which will heal more quickly and be more ascetically pleasing.

Anvil type pruners have a blade which stops when it makes contact with the flat cutting surface. Using this on live branches can crush part of the stem or branch tissue. It can also cause tears and create more contact area for pest and disease problems.

“Stay away from the anvil, they are just mashers,” Strayer said. “Avoid buying cheap pruners, they (good quality pruners) are a good investment. Keep them sharp.”

Keeping tools sharp will make the job not only easier, but will minimize self-injury and less damage to plant pruning. Sanitation between

pruning different plants is essential to minimizing the spread of disease. Simple bleach solutions or alcohol swabs are easy enough to become routine.

Guidelines for the right size tool for the stem or branch is 1" in diameter or smaller, pruners will work, while loppers will be best for 2" or larger. Anything thicker, select a hand saw. Cutting the branch back as much as possible before the final cut will lower the weight load and make the work less unwieldy. Additionally, to decrease damage to the rest of the tree or shrub, make a preliminary cut on the opposite side of main cut to minimize splintering and bark tear.

Other ideas for building confidence in pruning is to look for hands-on pruning classes through community colleges, botanical gardens, and Master Gardener programs which will provide more practice and instruction. Inquiring at a botanical garden or reputable nursery staff in the off-season for general questions can be helpful.

"You can take off more," Strayer warns, "but you can't glue it on."

Everyone has their methods of pruning. Hands-on practice will be the best training. Finding out what others use for guidance will also help as pruning is one part tool and many parts philosophy.

"When you're pruning," Chamberlain said, "step back and look at what you're doing." This was the advice he was given when he first started working in the Harper Collection.

"The worst time to prune is never," Strayer said.

Want to learn more about conifers?
Visit the ACS website at
www.conifersociety.org

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