

Conifers That Catch My Eye

Text and Photography Jeff Ashauer

My favorite dwarf conifers? Impossible to say. All my 450+ dwarf and miniature conifers are my favorites. There are, however, those that always catch my eye. Sometimes it is simply the pleasing shape of the plant, but often it's the cultural history behind the plant or where in the world it originated. And then, often, it is the memories of the kind people who developed the cultivars and made it possible for me to pursue my passion for collecting. Over time, it becomes mostly about the people that share the same joy.

I photographed a few examples of conifers that always catch my eye. Connecting the cultivar to its people and history is the fun element.



Pinus balfouriana 'Shelby'.

Pinus balfouriana 'Shelby' (Shelby foxtail pine) is a real prize. It came to me from Dennis Hermsen (Dennis Hermsen Garden and Nursery, Farley, IA) in 2015 and is happy, living here in Southern Illinois (USDA Zone 6b), despite originating from hard-to-reach regions of the Southern Sierra Nevada Mountains. Just as interesting, I am successfully growing both single-needle pinyon (*Pinus monophylla*) and double-needle

pinyon pine (*Pinus edulis*) from different areas of the Southwest. They played an important role in the culture of indigenous peoples on our continent.



Cryptomeria japonica 'Yellow Twig'.

Cryptomeria japonica 'Yellow Twig' (Yellow Twig Japanese cedar) arrived in 2017 in a four-inch pot from Larry Stanley (Stanley and Sons Nursery, Boring, OR) and quickly grew into a brilliant beauty. It simply glistens in the garden, which makes it hard not to appreciate. This *Cryptomeria* absolutely loves it here, perhaps because the local climate mimics its home areas in Japan.



Pinus sylvestris 'John Boy'.

Pinus sylvestris 'John Boy' (John Boy Scots pine) came in 2018 from Nathan Miller (Miller's Manor Garden Nursery, Canby, OR). I have marveled at the quality of Nathan's grafts and have many of his plants in my collection. I appreciate his talents and keep several conifers from Nathan in containers living on my deck. As a rule, *Pinus sylvestris* does well here.



Pinus ponderosa 'Pennock Pass Pincushion'.

Pinus ponderosa 'Pennock Pass Pincushion' (Pennock Pass Pincushion ponderosa pine) is absolutely my choice for ponderosas, although other ponderosa cultivars have special histories and shapes. This plant originally came to me in 2015 from Kirk Fieseler (LaPorte Avenue Nursery, Ft. Collins, CO), who found it about 30 miles west of town. It is so tight that you can't push a finger through it. "P3", as Kirk refers to it, is so impressive that he gives it to friends as a gift. Also, to Kirk's credit, is his commitment to keep many of the finds of Jerry Morris in cultivation through his relationship with the Denver Botanic Gardens.

Tsuga canadensis 'Cole' (Cole's prostrate Canadian hemlock) is a new arrival to my collection from Bruce Appeldoorn (Appeldoorn's Landscape Nursery, Bostic, NC). Many of you know him as a contributor to **CONIFERQUARTERLY**, and he is indeed among all the friendly people I've been fortunate to meet in my collecting endeavors. 'Cole' is described as a "rock garden jewel" by John C. Swartley in *The Cultivated Hemlocks* (Google Books, 1984) and was found in 1929 by H.R. Cole near the bottom of Mt. Madison (NH). Great cultivars meet the test of time, and this is among the best.



Tsuga canadensis 'Cole'.

Pinus parviflora 'Kusu dama' (Kusu dama Japanese white pine) came to me in 2013 from the late Dennis Dodge (Bethlehem Nursery, CT). Dennis had a crusty but very kindhearted personality and would sometimes send me plants "just to try". He once asked me when I was going to get *serious* about collecting and pursued the issue until he was convinced that I got his meaning. 'Kusu dama' was in the last group of plants that arrived before his passing, and I had no way to translate the name. I asked Talon Buchholz for help through his wife, and the translation came back as "blue ball", which it seems to be.



Pinus parviflora 'Kusu dama'.

Finally, I have a photograph of a group of conifers in containers. These plants are waiting their turn to be



Left to right and top to bottom: *Picea orientalis* 'Lil Sky', *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Little Markey', *Pinus mugo* 'Congesta', *Picea omorika* 'Wodan', *Abies lasiocarpa* 'Schneider', *Thuja occidentalis* 'IslPrim' Primo™, *Sequoiadendron giganteum* 'Conrad Appel'.

introduced into the main garden and represent a fine group of people and nurseries committed to dwarf conifers. Left to right and top to bottom: *Picea orientalis* 'Lil Sky' (Lil Sky Caucasian spruce) from Talon Buchholz (Buchholz & Buchholz Nursery, Gaston, OR), *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Little Markey' (Little Markey Hinoki cypress) from Bruce Appeldoorn (Appeldoorn Landscape Nursery, Bostic, NC), *Pinus mugo* 'Congesta' (Congesta mugo pine) from Larry Stanley (Stanley and Sons Nursery, Boring, OR), *Picea omorika* 'Wodan' (Wodan Serbian spruce) from Gary Gee (Gee Farms, Stockbridge, MI), *Abies lasiocarpa* 'Schneider' (Schneider subalpine fir) from Jason Hupp (Drake's Crossing Nursery, Silverton, OR), *Thuja occidentalis* 'IslPrim' Primo™ (Primo™ eastern arborvitae) from Iseli Nursery (Boring, OR), and *Sequoiadendron giganteum* 'Conrad Appel' (Conrad Appel giant sequoia) from Paulie Seidel (Crowfoot Nursery, Sandy, OR).

Although his plants are not photographed for this article, Bob Fincham has been a steady educator and contributor to the world of dwarf conifers. His book, *Gone But Not Forgotten* (Coenosium Press, 2016), highlights many of the people important to the development of our mutual passion. In a recent trip to the Pacific Northwest, I heard his name mentioned with a couple of emerging conifer nurseries that are already awesome in their own right. I was fortunate to get to meet Paulie Seidel at Crowfoot Nursery (Sandy, OR) and Gil McNeal (Burkland Gardens, Mt. Vernon, WA). It is people like these with a passion for conifers, along with others mentioned in the article, who are carrying on providing the next conifer that "Catches the Eye".

Jeff Ashauer has had a life-long love for trees and has collected dwarf and miniature conifers his entire adult life. He is a happy grandfather and lives with his wife Bettie in rural Southern Illinois (USDA Zone 6b).