

# 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.



Quarry Hill Botanic Garden

Photo by Janice LeCocq

## So, what exactly is a reference garden?

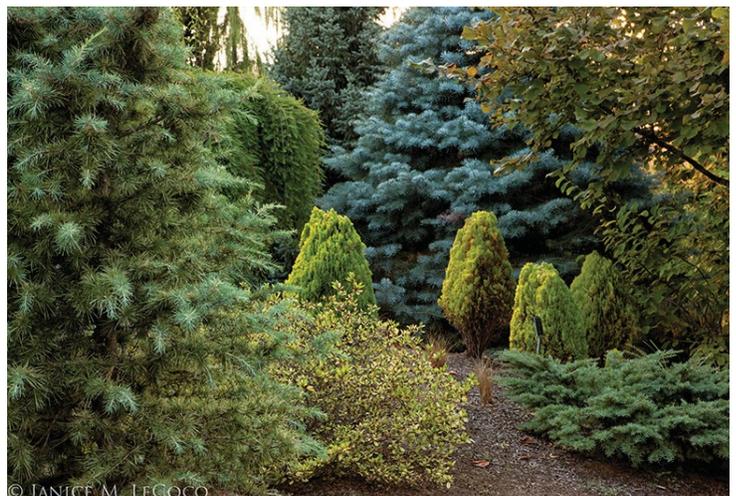
The idea comes as a way to offer a “point of reference” for conifers that grow locally. It is a means for our members to see and compare larger numbers and specimens of conifers. For ACS purposes, the garden must be an institutional ACS member, open to the public and must have a minimum number and variety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



Curator Martin Nicholson presenting the collection

Photo by Janice LeCocq

This partnership allows public gardens 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.



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Oregon Garden

Photo by Janice LeCocq



Raulston Arboretum

Photo by Janice LeCocq

### **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?**

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.

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 all over the United States.

### **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 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".