Hello, Everyone!

It has been a great year for gardening! We have spent so much time out in the yard it has been wonderful. We have spent the last couple of weeks planning what needs to be relocated in the next month or so. We have been growing conifers for a long time now and have learned that those one or three-gallon plants bought did not read the tags they were sold with. The good thing is they were happy where we had them, so, hopefully, they will enjoy their new location a few feet away.

For those who sent us pictures of your gardens to share in the zoom meetings we started in October, thank you so much. It has been really nice to “get out” and see what other people are growing and how. We plan on continuing the virtual tours for as long as we have pictures to share, so if you have a few photos of your garden, you can send them to Jennifer or me and Jennifer will put them into a power point. We let you know when we will have the next meeting so you can join and talk about your garden. If you are not comfortable talking about your photos, send us information and we will talk about it for you and add the info to the slides.

We are looking for other topics to have virtual meetings about until we can safely resume our meetings and lectures at hotels again. If you have a knack for grafting or rooting or pruning, we would love to have a slide show about it. Other topics I think people would like to hear about are plant exploration trips or gardens you have seen while traveling.

Our next meeting is planned for May 1st, in Knoxville, TN. We are planning a socially distanced meeting! Our featured garden is GATOP, Dr. Alan Solomon’s garden, with side trips being planned for other gardens such as the UT Knoxville gardens and Knoxville Botanic Garden and Arboretum. Hopefully, we will have some private gardens available for touring as well. All these gardens are multiple acres with plenty of space for social distancing and are very easy to drive to with plenty of parking (there will be no buses). Many things are still in the planning stages, but we will have the final details worked out by the March newsletter.

Let’s not forget it is the season where conifers really take the stage! What would it be without a wonderful Balsam fir or other conifer, all decorated for the season, front and center. Also, there are all those wonderful wreaths and center pieces everyone makes. Let’s share these with each other on the American Conifer Society Southeast Region Facebook page—https://www.facebook.com/groups/351809468684900/

Jeff Harvey, President
Around the Southeast Region

If You Have a Minute...

There has been nothing to tell you about, in terms of events, lately, and it’s been difficult to find articles, too, so the last couple of editions of the Southeastern Quarterly have been pretty sparse. I’ve been trying to think of how to keep our newsletter interesting and inspiring, in times when we especially need a lift.

You’ll notice that this edition includes a piece on nature documentaries that I’ve enjoyed. It’s the first time for that, I think, but it could be the beginning of something bigger, if you’ll kick in. Assuming you guys like that piece, then what if you send me reviews of nature, garden, and especially conifer-related books and movies, to share with your fellow SER members? Those, plus the tips on tools and techniques that you use in your own gardens, seem to me to be a rich source of information and entertainment we could all appreciate, and it wouldn’t take you more than a few minutes to write them up. I know I’d love any advice you could give, whether it’s about a better way to accomplish a garden task or spend an enjoyable time, kicked back with a book or a movie—or something else. Music? Games? Whatever! I can compile the reviews, so don’t worry, if your piece is short. And, of course, I would LOVE to have full articles, too! Thanks to Robin Tower for her contribution to this edition!

I’m counting on all of you to keep our newsletter special. Send your contribution to me, anytime, at sphxxx3@gmail.com.

March 15th Newsletter Deadline is February 15th!

Make Friends and Share Ideas with Other Coneheads!

by Robin Tower, Facebook Group Administrator

The ACS Southeast Region’s Facebook Group is really taking off! We now have nearly 230 members, and you can be next! Just go to https://www.facebook.com/groups/351809468684900/ and click JOIN! Anyone can join, and anyone can post. If you have any questions about how to join or post to the group, email me at goldnpaws@gmail.com.

People who have posted questions are getting quick responses and good advice. Pictures of conifers and conifers in combinations with other plants are an inspiration to all of us! There are already a lot of good conversations going.

We are especially excited to use this site as a support group, so: Are you having a problem with a particular conifer? Pest, disease, unexplained illness? Post a question! Share the good and get help with the bad in the American Conifer Society Southeast Group!

Email Robin at: goldnpaws@gmail.com
Jeff Harvey sent some great photos of this wonderful tool, sometimes called a hand scythe or sickle, but he didn’t write much about it, saying only that it’s a great tool for cutting down perennials or grasses or anything that isn’t woody. Coincidentally, I had just bought one, myself, when faced with fall cleanup, especially cutting back big clumps of Carex and other perennial grasses. I hate that job, so I started Googling for a tool and came up with the Japanese hand sickle, known as nokogama in Japan.

This is a light, inexpensive, and wickedly sharp garden tool. It must be used with care and carefully stored, when not in use. The carbon steel blade is very finely serrated, with the sharpened edge on the inside of the curve. It was just what I needed.

While I’ve only used it on grass, so far, we’ve just had our first hard freeze, and I’ll be getting it out to cut back all the multi-stemmed plants that are now about as appealing as two-week-old lettuce. Nevertheless, I can tell you that it’s only a little less than a miracle in its ability to power through ‘Everillo’. I was so impressed after the first clump that I found myself just staring at the blade and thinking, “Wow!” I effortlessly finished a whole grove of grass in less than a tenth of the time it usually takes me! From what I’ve read, it’s also great for cutting back succulents, such as Agave. Others use it for weeding, since it can easily cut roots well below the soil line, but I have a hori hori I prefer for work like that, and I want to keep this blade razor sharp.

Anyway, Jeff and I both heartily recommend the Japanese hand sickle. You won’t find a better value in a $20-25 tool.
I’ve loved conifers for 40 years, but when I retired about 5 years back, the mania for them really set in. I had visited the Harper Collection at Hidden Lake Gardens in Michigan, and I longed for the broad sweeping curves of their gorgeous specimens. Since I live on an old corn patch just west of Winston-Salem, NC, and securely in zone 7a, I knew I couldn’t just start digging holes. Semi-trailer loads of mulch arrived, were spread, and allowed to rot - for a while! And then the conifers arrived, mostly in quarts and gallons – my, they were small!

A couple of years ago, it occurred to me that some of the gaps could be filled with flowering plants (I had visited Bressingham by this time!), so I cast about for perennials, bulbs even annuals that would take zero maintenance. After all, my growing conifer collection had to be drip irrigated, weeded and loved! I was looking for color and texture with minimum maintenance.

I knew grasses were the traditional answer – and they were planted. They promptly grew too large and proved a total chore to move. A hardy *Yucca filamentosa* ‘Variegata’ was planted in various spots, but it hasn’t really fit in yet. And did I mention weeding around it? It does look fabulous in the winter sunshine with a *Pinus mugo* ‘Aurea’ next to it. The daffodils and other spring flowering bulbs are great while they last, but what about the rest of the year?

Casting about, I realized that the *Sedum* ‘Autumn Joy’ probably didn’t really like the damp shady spot that the oak had created in my back yard, so it got moved to a sunny dry spot—and I was right! Great blooms, no water. I thought the *Salvia guaranitica* with its big bulbous roots would follow suit – nope!

Also out of that shady bed moved an *Iris sibirica* ‘Caesar’s Brother’. It’s a real show stopper near the *Cupressus cashmeriana* – and elsewhere, because it multiplies happily!

Another transplant was the Aster (now *Symphyotrichum*) novae-angliae. The cultivar ‘Our Latest One’ is still blooming at Thanksgiving near a young *Picea pungens*.

I had killed or lost numerous tickseed cultivars, but had a persistent clump of *Coreopsis*...
Another perennial that was proving invasive in my flower beds was the beautiful goldenrod, Solidago rugosa ‘Fireworks’. This year I moved it near Pinus thunbergii ‘Thunderhead’ and found that the two agreed quite well!

There are two summer bulbs that I have found work well in my conifer gardens: Crinum lilies add an elegant touch and Crocosmia added a brash exuberance. Crocosmia ‘Lucifer’ is pictured on the next page.

In addition, annuals can be worth your while. Tithonia rotundifolia, the Mexican sunflower, will fill in a large space rapidly. It easily grows to 5 feet from seed and will spend the

(Continued on page 6)
months of July through frost covered with butterflies. This year I tried *Rudbeckia* – not the usual one which self-sows happily, but *Rudbeckia laciniata*. A lovely large rosette of deep green is followed by spikes of graceful yellow flowers (at 5 feet) from August until frost.

The hydrangeas found in so many conifer beds haven’t worked well for me – I think they want a lot of water. *Hydrangea paniculata* ‘Tardiva’ is a major exception and puts on a fabulous display from August until frost. It looks especially well backed by a dark green or blue, shown here with *Cunninghamia lanceolata* and *Cupressus arizonica* ‘Blue Ice’ (Picture 10). Another shrub that will show off in front of (and in the protection of) tall conifers is *Cistus* (Rock rose). They are supposed to be hardy to zone 8, but have never let me down in zone 7a. Mine are protected by a nearby *Platycladus orientalis* ‘Franky Boy’.

I know I have just scraped the surface of what can be done with flowers among the conifers. I am still figuring out what should go where and what else might work. I would love to hear from others about what has worked for them in similar conditions. Please contact me at goldnpaws@gmail.com. Alternatively, you might post your successes (or failures!) on our fun Facebook page: American Conifer Society Southeast Region. See you there!

**About the Author**

Robin Tower is a retired CPA who loves the textures and colors of conifers. She gardens about 4 acres of conifer beds and says she is gradually learning to integrate other plants in the beds to enhance the conifers.
In these days that find most of us spending much more time at home and in which movie theaters are closed, we fortunately have the option to stream our entertainment directly into our own living rooms onto big, bright, flat-screen TVs. I don’t know about you, but I can remember back to the tiny, rounded screen that fascinated me and my brothers with black and white cartoons of singing animals, when we visited our grandparents. But that was long, long ago, and now we can sit far back on our comfortable sofas and access the world on our screens—at least those of us who have been blessed with what would be called unimaginable wealth, even in some parts of our own country.

These are some of the films I’ve seen that I thought might inspire wonder in these less than wonderful times. They are beautiful, inspiring, and entertaining, too. I’ll begin by saying that none of these movies is specifically about conifers, but all are about nature. Two, Fantastic Fungi and Call of the Forest, The Forgotten Wisdom of Trees, were recommended to me by my friend, Robert Barker. The other, Rivers and Tides, I happened upon, myself, several years ago. All are wonderfully filmed and thought provoking. I think you might enjoy them as much as I have.

**Fantastic Fungi (2019)** – Available to stream from Amazon Prime for $3.99 and from other sources. See [https://fantasticfungi.com/watch/](https://fantasticfungi.com/watch/)

This is one of the most beautiful films I’ve ever seen, and the concepts it presents regarding the importance and potential uses of fungi are startling and exciting. Here are a few quotes from published reviews:


“Schwartzberg’s film quickly proves to be one of the year’s most mind-blowing, soul-cleansing and yes, immensely entertaining triumphs.” – Matt Fagerholm, RogerEbert.com
“...a must see for anyone interested in life, death and the pursuit of the planet’s well-being.” – David Carpenter, Forbes.

**Rivers and Tides: Andy Goldsworthy Working With Time (2001) - Available to stream free from Amazon Prime**

This illustration is a photo I took of my own copy of this movie. In a way, that speaks to the fact that it came out in 2001, when many of us were buying DVDs. Even after I donated most of mine to charity, I kept this one, because I was so moved by the art of Andy Goldsworthy, a Scottish environmental artist who’s work in stone, leaves, twigs, and ice are built in nature and are, for the most part, ephemeral.

This is a quiet movie, very much deeper than words, touching the beauty in nature that we can never express but only experience. *Rivers and Tides* contains minimal dialogue, but it provides a space in which we can observe a man in intimate conversation with nature, allowing us to witness that conversation about the cycle of creativity and its evolution and transformation, over time.

**Call of the Forest—The Forgotten Wisdom of Trees (2016). Available to stream free from Amazon Prime.**

This film features Diana Beresford-Kroeger, a famed botanist, environmentalist, and author, who takes us on a journey to discover the spiritual and material impacts that forests have on our lives. I learned so much from this movie about the interactions of forests and oceans, forests and deserts, and forests and climate change. Perhaps most importantly, this film brings home the functionality and complexity of the forest organism—something far surpassing its common definition as a collection of trees. Another beautiful film, this was also an introduction, for me, to a learned botanist who is also a gentle spokesperson and powerful advocate for reforestation, whose work I hadn’t known before. You can watch the official trailer for this movie, here: https://calloftheforest.ca/about/synopsis-and-trailer/

I hope you enjoy these films as much as I have and that the beauty of nature inspires you, every day.
When you go to the Southeast Region Reference Garden Map via the link provided above, clicking on the name of a reference garden in the list on the left zooms the map to that garden’s location and provides information on the garden you clicked. Click on a star to identify gardens in locations you may want to visit. Depending upon what’s available, you will see any or all of the following: the physical address, phone number, web site, photos, and a link to click if you need directions. Our Reference Gardens are a treasure! Visit soon!

Map of all SE Region reference gardens, with complete addresses:
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1LCf4ig6ltGKdMAdy6aeVajj0&usp=sharing
Christmas is coming, and we’re all getting fat... That’s how the old rhyme goes, isn’t it? I’ve just read one of Martha Church’s email compilations of pandemic memes, so I can’t help but make a semi-joke, myself. Laughter is such good medicine for these times when we’ve often had little to laugh about. (Thanks, Martha!) It’s good for us—relaxing and healthy—just like working in our gardens, and it helps us ward off the worst of these difficult times. It’s likely that many of us will be staying home for the holidays.

We may find ourselves foregoing tradition, for our own safety and that of those we love. Maybe this will be the year when Christmas and Hanukkah are remembered for their peace, rather than for the noise of gathering friends and family. It can be wondrous, nonetheless—a time of reflection and also a time of hope. Next year will be better.

My younger brother died of COVID just before Thanksgiving. He was a wonderful man, greatly loved by his wife and daughter and by his sister, so these words are not just platitudes—stiff upper lip and all that. I know the truth of it when I say that spending the holidays at home is not the worst thing that can happen to us. Rather, it can be the best gift we will ever give to one another. It’s only for a little while longer, if we have enough love to span the miles while our bodies remain at home, this one holiday season.

Regardless of how you spend the holidays, I wish you peace and happiness. For all of us, I look forward to a new year, when we can enjoy the simple pleasure of sharing a smile and a hug with those we love, once again.

Sandy

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**Share Your Tips!**

**In the Garden**

Share your garden tips and tricks, favorite tools or design ideas, successes and failures. Tell your fellow ACS members how you made a path, built a new planting bed, dug up a stump, dealt with weeds, defeated a fungus or a critter (2-, 4-, 6-, or 8-legged!). How do you fertilize, make compost, or improve your soil? Do you have a strategy for moving big rocks, digging up stumps, clearing draining the swamp? What is the best way to help a new planting succeed?

Send your helpful thoughts to us, along with a picture or two, and be our next “In the Garden” author. We look forward to hearing from you!

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You can order bulbs from Brent and Becky’s and support the Southeast Region at the same time, so why not take advantage of this opportunity to surprise your friends with bulbs for Christmas? It’s easy to do, and they’ll be so glad you did! Instead of going directly to the Brent and Becky’s website, go to Bloom-inBucks.com and select American Conifer Society Southeast Region from the dropdown menu. You will then be taken to the Brent and Becky’s website, and 25% of anything you spend there will go to the Southeast Region! You don’t pay anything extra for your bulbs, but your purchases will support the Southeast Region. Happy Planting!