DWARF CONIFER GARDEN

One of the best of its kind in the country, the Dwarf Conifer Garden showcases more than 150 different kinds of the smaller members of the conifer family. Renovated in 2008, the garden includes a new staircase entrance, views to the Japanese Garden and Great Basin, and a widened, accessible-to-all path.

The renovation of the Dwarf Conifer Garden has been made possible by a generous gift from Georgiana Taylor, with support from the Woman’s Board of the Chicago Horticultural Society. The Chicago Botanic Garden is home to one of the nation’s premier plant conservation programs, through which scientists tackle the most pressing issues in the plant conservation field. To learn more about conifers, visit www.conifersociety.org. The American Conifer Society offers these size guidelines for all conifers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Approximate growth per year</th>
<th>Approximate size at 30 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dwarf</td>
<td>1 to 6 inches</td>
<td>6 to 15 feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>6 to 12 inches</td>
<td>6 to 15 feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>More than 12 inches</td>
<td>More than 15 feet</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Site and soil**
Overall, dwarf conifers thrive in sunny locations with well-drained, slightly acidic, sandy soil (though most perform well in Chicago’s less-than-perfect clay soils). Yews, spruces, and hemlocks can take partially shady conditions, but conifers don’t grow well in heavy shade. Conifers benefit from periodic fertilizer applications.

**Pruning**
Because most dwarf conifers grow so slowly, pruning is rarely required. Conifers shed previous years’ needles regularly in the spring—that’s why the interior of an evergreen is bare. Dead needles can be left as natural mulch for the plant.

**GARDENING WITH DWARF CONIFERS**
Dwarf conifers are ideal plants for Chicagoland’s smaller yards and gardens. They’re low-maintenance and resistant to most insects and diseases; many have year-round color; and there is an extraordinary range of sizes and shapes available.

**DWARF CONIFER SELECTIONS**

- **Dwarf conifers for blue color**
  What humans see as blue color is actually a protective, waxy outer coating on new-growth needles. It wears off over time.

  *Picea pungens* ‘Montgomery’ — Colorado Spruce. A compact clone that’s one of the best of the blues.

  *Juniperus scopulorum* ‘Blue Carpet’ — Singleseed Juniper. This juniper with silver-blue foliage makes a good ground cover.

- **Dwarf conifers for gold color**
  *Picea pungens* ‘Spring Ghost’ — Colorado Spruce. Spring growth is whitish-yellow.

  *Juniperus horizontalis* ‘Mohar’s Lozi’ — Cropping Juniper. This prostrate form is bright yellow in summer.

- **Dwarf conifers for partial shade**
  *Tsuga x media* ‘Treeless’ — Yew. A low grower that can handle both partial shade and wind.

  *Tsuga canadensis* ‘Stevens’s Gem’ — Canadian Hemlock. Tolerates light shade.

**TO LEARN MORE**


The American Conifer Society website offers in-depth information about conifers at www.conifersociety.org.

Dwarf Conifer Forms

All hardy in Midwest gardens, these dwarf varieties delight the eye with interesting shapes, textures, and colors. Sizes listed are approximate at 10 years old.

**Globose** Naturally round forms add formality to walkways, beds, and edgings.
- *Thuja occidentalis* ‘Little Gem’ – Eastern Arborvitae, 1-3 feet tall by 4½ -6 feet wide.
- *Chamaecyparis thyoides* ‘Heatherbun’ – Heatherbun Falsecypress, 5 feet tall by 4-5 feet wide.

**Mound** Low and rounded, mounded forms can hide the stems and foliage of plants behind them, and create interesting, organic bumps and hills in too-flat beds and lawns.

**Columnar** Narrow or close-to-the-street yards benefit from the screening qualities of taller-than-broad uprights. Also good as hedges and windbreaks.
- *Juniperus horizontalis* ‘Mother Lode’ – Creeping Juniper, less than 1 foot tall by 2-3 feet wide.

**Pendulous** Weeping, drooping branches make the pendulous forms ideal focal points in beds or borders.
- *Tsuga canadensis* ‘Pendula’ – Canadian Hemlock, 5 feet tall by 7 feet wide.
- *Juniperus rigida* ‘Pendula’ – Weeping Juniper, 4-5 feet tall by 2-3 feet wide.

**Flattened Globose or Nest** An unusual shape, often with a bowl-shaped center.
- *Picea abies* ‘Repens Gold’ – Golden Bird’s Nest Norway Spruce, 3 feet tall by 4 feet wide.

**Prostrate** Prostrate forms grow flat, and when planted on an incline they appear to flow downhill.
- *Pinus pumila* ‘Hillside Creeping’ – Scots Pine, 2 feet tall by 6-8 feet wide.

**Upright Pyramid** When punctuation is called for, use a cone-shaped form. Excellent as anchor when partnered with other dwarf conifers.
- *Abies concolor* ‘Select’ – White Fir, 5 feet tall by 3 feet wide.
- *Picea abies* ‘Cupressina’ – Norway Spruce, 6-8 feet tall by 3 feet wide.

**Irregular** Free-flowing, irregular shapes add softness to informal or cottage-style gardens.
- *Larix decidua* ‘Varied Directions’ – European Larch, 8-10 feet tall by 10-12 feet wide.

Rare or Unusual Dwarf Conifers

Use the map to locate them.

1. *Thuja plicata* ‘Nana’ – Hiba or False Arborvitae. A connoisseur’s plant with bright green foliage in summer. It can grow well in partial shade, but is marginally hardy in this area.
2. *Picea pungens* ‘Pendula’ – Colorado Spruce. This popular form, with branches that cascade downward, performs well.
4. *Picea abies* ‘Virgata’ – Snake Branch Spruce. Rather like a giant stick figure, this Norway spruce has long, dark green needles.
6. *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* ‘Miss Grace’ – Dawn Redwood. A rare, weeping dwarf form of dawn redwood, this is one of the few deciduous conifers.
7. *Pinus contorta* ‘Taylor’s Sunburst’ – This unusual pine has bright golden yellow new growth that persists through summer.

Unusual shapes, unexpected colors, and 150 dwarf varieties in one unique garden.