

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 11-16-05) Miniature and Dwarf Conifers © 2005

What do you plant when you've planted up practically every square inch of your garden? Try finding a few spaces for the tiny delights called miniature and dwarf conifers. You can plant them grouped in containers or separately planted in a myriad variety of small containers. Or tuck them in little spaces alongside paths to catch your eye as you pass by.

Locally you'll find these temptations at Bergers Garden and Gift Center on Adele in Bremerton (where I discovered the ones I'll tell you about in this column), or Valley Nursery in Poulsbo, Bainbridge Gardens and Bay Hay on Bainbridge. You'll also want to visit www.stanleynursery.com to peruse the website listing several hundred plants to select. You can navigate the site to see photos of the conifers and evergreens along with descriptions of their ultimate small size. Bergers, Valley, Bay Hay and Bainbridge Gardens staff have selected the varieties that will grow most easily here in Kitsap County, but you can peruse the Stanley Nursery website and if you find a temptation not currently in stock at the nurseries please ask the staff to try to procure it for you. Many nurseries are already ordering in lots of plants for spring shopping. It's not too early to ask the buyers to order in a few of your favorites. Better yet, ask the staff what's their favorite plant to have for winter and spring.

Rebecca Walch at Berger's is a wealth of information on these tantalizing textural mini-conifers. She's created several of her own small container gardens and will gladly help you put together one to festoon your entryway or to tuck in a favorite spot of your garden. Rebecca's favorite (if you can only afford one of these plants) is *Chamaecyparis obtuse* 'Cream Tart' a variegated beauty. It's dark green with creamy tipping scattered throughout the minute needles.

My favorite plants in Berger's mini conifer area were: *Cotoneaster cooperi* (an evergreen cotoneaster), *Chamaecyparis obtuse* 'Verkades Golden' (striking foliage), *Ilex crenata* 'Dwarf Pagoda' (the teeniest holly relative); and *Rhododendron azalea* 'Chinsei' (the name means tranquility, blossoms will be purple with dark spots). I visited the Stanley Nursery website and found other temptations: *Chamaecypris lawsonia* 'Elwoods Nymph' which grows only two inches tall in its entire lifetime; *Cotoneaster horizontalis* 'Cheney' (named for our Cheney, Washington) a dwarf variegated variety which will grow only one foot by three feet in ten years; *Cotoneaster microphyllus* 'Thymifolius' with dark green leaves curling down at the edges; *Hebe cupressoides* 'Boughton's Dome' which will only reach 8 inches by 12 inches after 10 years. The final supreme temptation (not yet available) is *Ginkgo biloba* 'Green Pagoda' reaching only 2 feet by sixteen inches after ten years. It has a conical habit and is grown from cuttings. Hopefully by spring our nurseries will have this fascinating small Ginkgo tree for us to take home.

The dwarf conifer varieties now available at many of our local nurseries grow slowly over ten to thirty years and are good for small gardens, Bonsai, limited garden space and can live happily in containers for many years.

Miniature and dwarf conifers combine perfectly with hyper tufa and aggregate cement containers. Haunt your local nurseries for suitable containers for conifer plantings. Rebecca stacked three varying sizes of ceramic stoneware containers making a Zen garden planted with several mini conifers. She'll help you construct your own tranquility garden too. Bergers is open from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

Contact Peg in care of this newspaper or email gardenmentor@yahoo.com or ptillery@co.kitsap.wa.us