

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 11-26-08) Miniature and Dwarf Conifers © 2008

This is the time of year when we still hanker for a tiny bit of winter gardening outside. We often don't want to stay out too long, but we want to get a plant of some sort into the ground or into a container. Here are a few tiny delights to pop into a container, window box or into just the perfect small scale garden space.

Dwarf conifers fit small spaces ideally and require a minimum of care unless they're in a container. All container plants need regular watering. Plant them grouped into one single container or try grouping about three to seven small containers singly planted with one mini-conifer. Remember to tuck these green treats into little spaces alongside paths to catch your eye as you pass by.

You'll find these temptations at most of our local nurseries. For ideas ahead of time visit www.stanleynursery.com to peruse the website listing several hundred plants to select from. Not all of these varieties are available here in Kitsap County, but you'll get some good ideas by navigating the site to see photos of the conifers and evergreens along with descriptions of their ultimate small size. Our local nursery staffs have selected the varieties that will grow most easily here in Kitsap County. While you're at the nurseries many 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.

Staff will gladly help you put together container gardens festooned with delightful plants. If you only want to purchase one minute conifer try *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Cream Tart' a variegated beauty. It's dark green with creamy tipping scattered throughout the minute needles.

Here's a list of a few of my favorites of the moment: *Cotoneaster cooperi* (an evergreen cotoneaster), *Chamaecyparis obtusa* '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 you may enjoy: *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 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. This one is often scarce. If you see it, get it.

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.