

# Dwarf & Unusual Conifers for the Modern Garden

*Written & Photographed by Marc Depoto*

Tired of the same old evergreens? When people think of evergreens they usually conjure up images of yews and arborvitae devouring their front foundation, screening their windows and lacking any color! The truth is there are many exciting conifers available today that will make you rethink their place in the modern landscape.

First, let's define what a "conifer" is. A conifer is any plant that is cone bearing. Some examples of these are Pines, Spruce, and Fir. Conifers belong to an ancient plant group called the *Gymnosperms*. However, not all conifers are evergreens. *Dawn Redwood*, *Bald Cypress*, and *Larch* are examples of deciduous needle plants, and though rare, they drop their needles each year with the onset of winter. Also, not all conifers are solely "needle bearing". *Ginkgo trees*, *Cycad palms*, and the massive *Kauri* of New Zealand are conifers but look much different than their "needled" counterparts.

The modern gardener will love the array of different forms, architecture, and color available with the modern day conifers. Many of these plants are low maintenance, drought tolerant, and slow growing. Professionals segregate them into four categories, in regards to growth rate.

**Large:** Grows to 12" or more per year.

**Intermediate:** Grows 6-12" per year.

**Dwarf:** Grows 1-6" per year.

**Miniature:** Grows 1" per year.

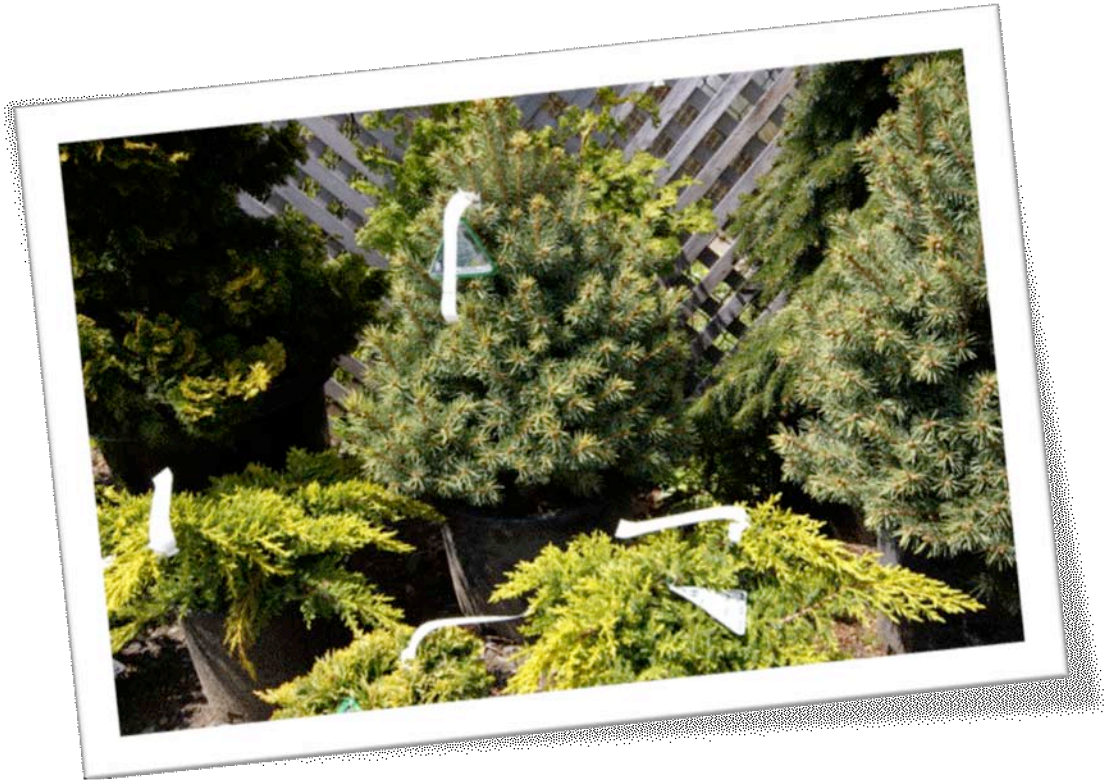
**The following are some samples of conifers you can find at Hillside Nurseries:**

***Montgomery Blue Spruce:*** A dwarf form of blue spruce.



Striking blue color 365 days a year! Very drought tolerant and tough! Grows wider than it does tall.

**Sesters Dwarf Blue Spruce:** A dwarf form of blue Spruce.



Has a strong conical growth habit but otherwise similar to Montgomery.

**Blue Shag White Pine:** Dwarf form of our native White Pine.



Bluish/green color and soft appearance is a nice alternative to the typical Mugo Pine.

*Weeping White Spruce*: Intermediate



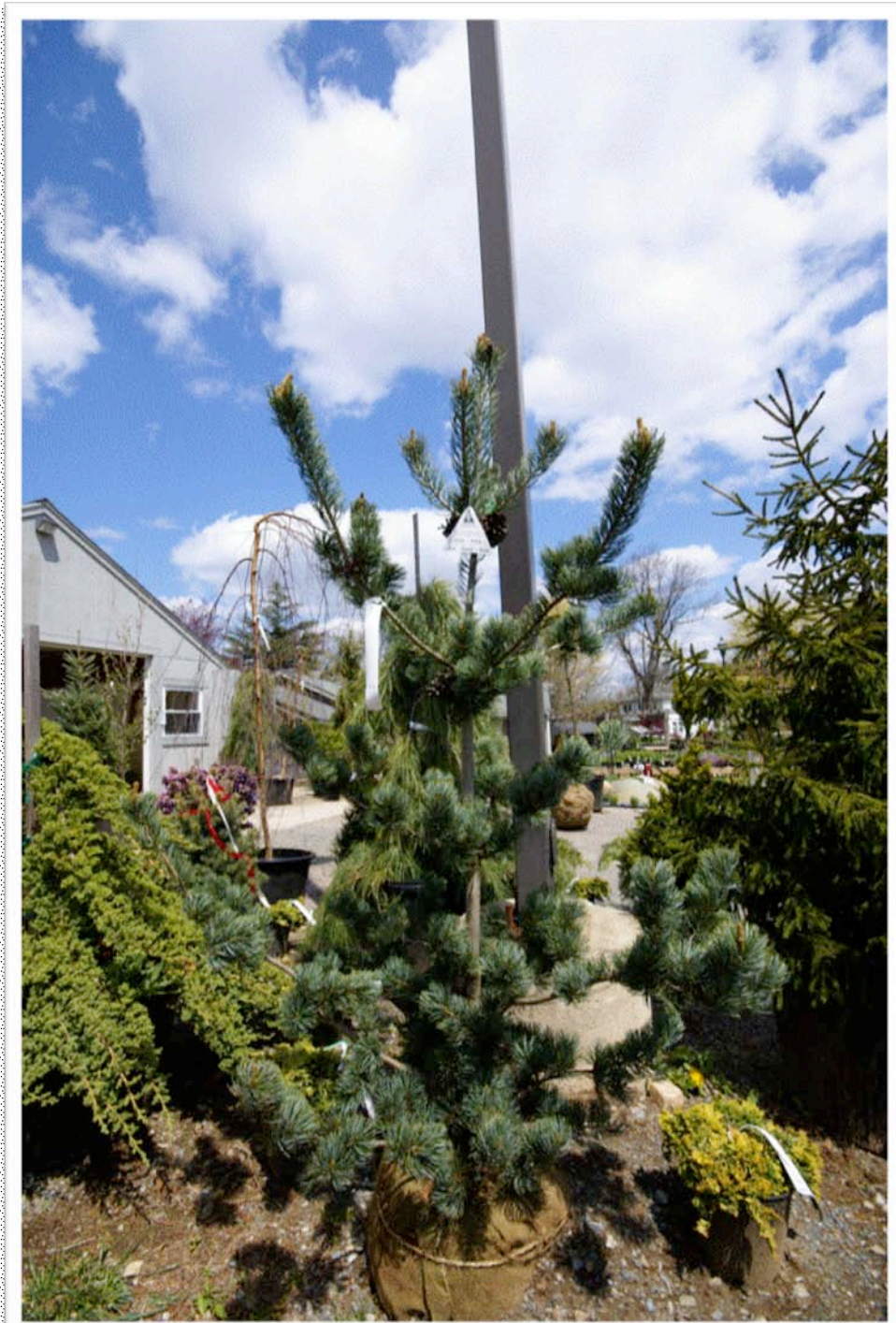
Strong architectural presence and perfect for tight spaces. Develops a small skirt-- getting not much wider than 5'.

*Giant Sequoia*: Large



The “King”! Giant Sequoia are the largest trees in the world. (Not exactly new, but still rare in these parts.) They grow fast and do well in protected locations here in Massachusetts. Who knows, in 3-4,000 years you might have a monster in your yard! Go see the largest of its kind east of the Mississippi River at the Blithewold Arboretum in Bristol RI.

*Japanese White Pine*: Several forms with different growth rates.



At any one time we may have several varieties of *Japanese White Pine* at Hillside Nurseries. Some look drastically different from each other. Pictured is a classic form of the species-- bluish foliage with an open airy appearance. *Ogon Janome* and *Goldilocks Japanese White Pines* have striking golden foliage and a more compact growth habit.

**Golden Spreader Fir:** Dwarf



This little one appreciates partially shaded areas and helps to brighten them.

**Howells Dwarf Tigertail Spruce:** Dwarf/intermediate.



Bi-color foliage with reddish/purple cones to boot!

*Sherwood Compact Bristlecone Pine* (left) and *Mitsch Select Umbrella Pine* (right): Miniature and Dwarf



Both are the picture-perfect little evergreens with two different looks. The *Sherwood Bristlecone* is dense and fine-textured while the *Mitsch Select Umbrella Pine* appears exotic with its rubbery foliage. It almost seems tropical!

*Angel Falls White Pine*: Large



There are several varieties of white pine on the market. Some forms are weeping, rounded, prostrate and pyramidal. There is even a variety with re-curved/curly needles. Hillside Nurseries carries several forms. “*Angel Falls*” would compliment a waterfall feature. Notice the native stand of white pine in the upper right portion of the picture.

*Verondi Hinoki Cypress*: Dwarf



There are so many *Hinoki Cypress* available it will make your head spin. I find that there is a lot of redundancy with this plant selection. I tend to simplify the selection here at the shop. Most forms are deep green in color. I have been a big fan of *Verondi* because it performs beautifully here in Massachusetts and is one of the hardiest gold forms.