

Dwarf Conifers

By Jane H., member of The Naperville Garden Club

A conifer is a cone-bearing evergreen. A dwarf conifer is one with a growth rate of less than six feet in height or width within twenty years. Most are mutations of commonly known conifers, such as pines, spruces, firs, junipers and cedars.

Dwarf conifers are often overlooked by home gardeners. In the garden, they become an artist's dream because of their many different shapes, textures and colors. Because of their slow growth and disease resistance, they require minimal care. Their colors range from pale moonbeam yellow to bold gold, from lime green to olive and from almost black to silver or steel blue. Some are variegated. Dwarf conifers, naturally misshapen and picturesque, add an architectural element to the landscape. Some are mounded and round while others are conical or cylindrical. Some are weeping and still others hug the ground.

Using dwarf conifers in the landscape can create endless compositions. They can be used as privacy screens, ground covers, foundation plantings or as backgrounds for flower borders. They are also effective as accents in rock gardens or as single specimens. No matter how they are used, they provide year-round interest. The best way to become acquainted with these dwarf gems is to see them displayed in the garden. The Chicago Botanic Gardens and the Morton Arboretum have collections you can view. .

Throughout all four seasons, these versatile plants shine. In the spring, the new growth is a rich color. During the summer, dwarf conifers provide a backdrop for the splashy blooms of annuals and perennials. They take on a renewed glow in the fall when their colors contrast with autumn reds, oranges and yellows. In the winter months, their evergreen color adds welcome winter interest to a garden and a light dusting of snow creates a fairyland of shapes. Although dwarf conifers are sometimes difficult to find at local nurseries, these treasures are well worth knowing and growing and provide joy throughout the year.

Members of Naperville Garden Club write this monthly gardening article for area homeowner association newsletters. Our hope is that your interest in gardening will be piqued and that we can pass along some new and valuable information. This is a civic project for our club and we sincerely hope you will enjoy the articles. The Naperville Garden Club meets on the 4th Wednesday of each month. If you are interested in visiting one of our meetings or have any questions, please visit our web site at www.napervillegardenclub.org.