

Conifers

Ponderosa Pine, our predominant native

The inland Northwest is forested by Ponderosa pine. Sturdy and drought tolerant, it is perfectly adapted to our climate. Luckily, it is an excellent tree under which to garden. The roots are not highly competitive. The canopy provides filtered shade rather than darkness. Its needles provide excellent winter mulch/insulation. Consult with an arborist, landscape architect, or garden designer before removing mature specimens.

Large conifers

In addition to Ponderosa, there are hundreds, if not thousands of conifers that thrive in our climate given typical irrigation. Larch (deciduous), hemlock, fir, spruce, cypress and false cypress, and many other species of pine are just a few of the main classes of larger conifers. For fastest growth, larch such as *Larix* 'Blue Rabbit' or a cypress cultivar, *Cupressus arizonica* 'Blue Ice' will provide the quickest route to a mature size conifer. Many pines are also fast growing, often adding 18" to 24" in a single season. The blue needled *Pinus flexilis* 'Vandewolf' is a very good choice for fast maturity and attractive, straight growth.

It is worth noting that alpine firs, *Abies lasiocarpa*, are dwarf only as the result of growing at elevation. When brought to Spokane's altitude instead of mountain top, alpine firs begin much more rapid growth. Thirteen years after planting, an alpine fir can reach 13' in diameter. An attractive tree indeed, but much larger than many people expect.

Dwarf conifers

Unlike the alpine fir, there are many conifers that remain dwarf in habit as a result of their genetic makeup. Often discovered as witches brooms in large trees, these have been grafted and brought into production by the nursery trade. Even the ponderosa has dwarf and semi-dwarf forms. *Pinus ponderosa* 'Dixie' is a compact dwarf installed in our pond area (under 2' tall).

The typical mugo pine is not all that small, growing to 8' or more in just a few years. However, there are many mugos that are actual dwarfs. The most popular cultivars are 'Slowmound', 'Valley Cushion', 'Sherwood Compact', 'Corley's Mat', and 'Mitsch Mini'.

False cypress (*Chamaecyparis*) represent virtually every color and shape, from the contorted 'Rashimaba' to the bright gold 'Mops'. Tiny miniatures such as 'Tsukomo', useful in troughs or doll house gardens, are found within the genus *Chamaecyparis*.

Among the most useful dwarf conifers are the dwarf forms of blue spruce. The full size blue spruce is a space monger, but the foliage is beautiful. Many cultivars are available, including 'Glauca Globosa' (rounded habit), 'The Blues' (weeping habit), 'St. Mary's Broom' (short pyramidal habit) and 'Procumbens' (prostrate habit).



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Full size conifers (over 15')

- Abies lasiocarpa* (alpine fir) One of the most popular residential conifers.
- Chamaecyparis nootkatensis* Weeping Alaskan Cedar. Narrow cultivars also offered, with 'Van den Aker' being the narrowest column (2' wide).
- Cupressus arizonica* 'Blue Ice' Large, fast growing conifer. Beautiful bark.
- Cupressus arizonica* 'Raywood's Weeping' Same brilliant blue as 'Blue Ice', but in a narrow weeping habit. Tall, but fits tight spots.
- Picea orientalis* 'Skylands' Fairly narrow, very gold spruce. Color all year.
- Picea pungens* 'Thompson' The bluest of all blue spruce. A rare spectacle.
- Pinus contorta* 'Chief Joseph' The most brilliant gold in a conifer--winter color.
- Tsuga canadensis* There are many forms of Canadian hemlock, but the basic species makes a very fine hedge for shade where considerable height is desired.

Dwarf conifers

- Juniperus communis* 'Compressa' There are many fine junipers. This little pencil point of a plant thrives in sun or part shade. 1' wide x 5' tall in 10 yrs
- Juniperus horizontalis* 'Mother Lode' A soft juniper that carpets, only 3" tall. bright gold color.
- Microbiota decussata* Siberian plant with soft foliage, sun or shade. Plum color in winter. Available grafted on standards as well.
- Picea abies* 'Jean's Dilly' A dwarf Alberta spruce, tighter habit. Good for pots.
- Picea pungens* 'Baby Blue Eyes' A dwarf (12') blue spruce with "Christmas tree" habit. All spruce are deer resistant.
- Picea pungens* 'Glauca Globosa' Rounded habit, to 6' in 10-15 years.
- Picea pungens* 'Procumbens' Grows prostrate, with few stems over 2'. Same attractive blue spruce foliage.
- Pinus mugo* 'Valley Cushion' A dwarf mugo that stays dwarf. Candle pines in spring; twist off 2/3's of new growth when it is fresh.
- Taxus x media* 'Everlow' A particularly low growing (under 3') yew. Deer resistant and shade tolerant.

Hedges

- Taxus x media* 'Hicksii' or 'Coles' These are upright forms of yew that make superior hedges for sun or shade. Deer resistant.
- Thuja occidentalis* 'Smaragd' The Emerald Arb, arborvitae. Fast, excellent hedge, but requires consistent moisture to look good and must be in sun.
- Tsuga canadensis* Described above. Large hedge for shade.