



Classes at Heronswood

Conifers for Color (Dr. Ross Bayton)

1. Why Grow Conifers? We live in the Evergreen State with many native conifers and our climate is perfect for the cultivation of conifers, making them hardy and easy to grow. Conifers are generally long-lived, offering good value for money, plus they have few pests and diseases. They are widely available to buy and great for cutting during wreath-making season.
2. Are Conifers Colorful? Most are evergreen, offering reliable shades of green year-round. Some change color in winter, while others change in fall, before shedding leaves. Breeders have developed gold, silver and variegated forms, while many have colorful cones or bark.
3. Cultivating Conifers. When choosing conifers, always look up the mature size, as seemingly small plants can grow very large, leading to costly removal by arborists. Some nurseries will list plant growth rate (inches per year), or you can check the American Conifer Society website. Choose a growth form that fits your garden, try to plant in fall, and water well throughout the first growing season. Remember that container cultivation is temporary!
4. Evergreen Foliage: Evergreen conifers provide a stable year-round green back drop for the rest of the garden. They come in many different shades of green and lots of different growth forms, so there's one (or more) for every situation.

Prince Albert's yew (*Saxegothaea conspicua*, 50') is native to Chile and has a weeping form. The leaves are dark green above and pale below, with new growth a fresh green. Also from Chile is the Monkey Puzzle (*Araucaria araucana*, 100'), a much larger tree with stiff, prickly leaves. Needs lots of room, but dramatic and distinctive as a specimen. A close relation is Wollemi Pine (*Wollemia nobilis*, 80'), a fairly new introduction from Australia with softer foliage and a smaller habit. Buddhist pine (*Podocarpus macrophyllus*, 30') is a common houseplant here, but also suitable for milder gardens.

5. Evergreen Foliage: Himalayan Pine (*Pinus wallichiana*, 50') is a delicate, drooping pine of extreme elegance. It is cold tolerant and often as wide as tall. Much daintier is the weeping Eastern Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis* 'Cole's Prostrate', 1'), which creeps across the ground creating a low parasol of foliage. Bristlecone pine (*Pinus aristata*, 20') is a slow-growing, long-lived tree notable for the white resin flecks on its needles. Himalayan weeping spruce (*Picea smithiana*, 40') is grey-green with heavily weeping branches.
6. Evergreen Foliage: Native incense-cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*, 70') is a tall, yet narrow conifer with glossy yellow-green foliage and a rich fragrance when crushed. Globe Japanese cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica* 'Globosa', 3') is a tough spherical shrub perfect for formal



gardens or containers. Elkhorn Cedar (*Thujopsis dolabrata*, 30') has tough, leathery, scaly stems with olive-green leaves with white undersides. Fujian cedar (*Fokienia hodginsii*, 40') is a rarity, but worth pursuing, as the new growth is coppery and fern-like.

7. Evergreen Foliage: Stinking Cedar (*Torreya taxifolia*, 30') is an endangered Florida native with sharp-tipped glossy needles. Japanese umbrella pine (*Sciadopitys verticillata*, 25') has leathery, flexible needles in umbrella-like whorls and a slow growth rate. Himalayan yew (*Taxus wallichiana*, 35') resembles other yews, though with more elegant needles, while Vietnamese Cedar (*Xanthocyparis vietnamensis*, 30') is a newly discovered species with unusual adult and juvenile foliage on the same plant.
8. Colorful Evergreens: Many junipers have silvery foliage and our native Common Juniper (*Juniperus communis*, 30') is no exception. This variable shrub or small tree is the source of juniper berries. The curly needles of Twisted White Pine (*Pinus strobus* 'Contorta', 40') are silver and white lined, while those of China Fir (*Cunninghamia lanceolata*, 35'). Several silvery forms of redwood exist and *Sequoia sempervirens* 'Henderson Blue' (30') are blue-tinged.
9. Colorful Evergreens: The 'Montgomery' form of Colorado Blue Spruce (*Picea pungens* 'Montgomery', 15') is shorter and more squat than wild forms, but shares the extremely silvery blue foliage, as does the Atlantic Cedar (*Cedrus atlantica* 'Glauca', 60'). Spanish Fir (*Abies pinsapo*, 50') has curious stubby needles that radiate out from the stems, plus a slow growth habit, while Arizona Cypress (*Cupressus arizonica*, 40') is more vigorous, but just as steely in color.
10. Colorful Evergreens: Golden Lawson Cypress (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Stewartii', 30') forms a broad cone of golden foliage that looks especially remarkable in winter; great for cutting and wreath-making. Similar in color, but smaller stature, Hinoki Cypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Sunlight Lace', 15') is more choice and better suited for smaller gardens, as is 'Tetragona Aurea' (10'). Completely different in texture, Golden Caucasian Spruce (*Picea orientalis* 'Skylands', 12') is a proper Christmas tree shape.
11. Colorful Evergreens: The striped form of Western Red-cedar (*Thuja plicata* 'Zebrina', 12') has delicate gold bands across the foliage, while *Pinus wallichiana* 'Zebrina' (10') has banded needles. Elkhorn Cedar (*Thujopsis dolabrata*, 30') has bold white patches on leaf undersides, while Dwarf Korean Fir (*Abies koreana* 'Icebreaker', 2') has white stripes under its needles.
12. Deciduous Conifers: Most conifers are evergreen, but the few deciduous species bring fall foliage color to the conifer color palette. Dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, 130') produces warm red and brown shades, while gold form 'Gold Rush' adds impressive summer color. Golden Larch (*Pseudolarix amabilis*, 30') has green needles in summer, transforming to a rich butter yellow in fall. Most true larches have worthy fall color and the



Twisted Japanese Larch (*Larix kaempferi* 'Diane', 20') is no exception with yellow and russet shades.

13. Chameleon Conifers: Some evergreen conifers change color in different seasons. Buddhist Pine (*Podocarpus macrophyllus*) has forms with purple new growth ('Emerald Flame') and yellow new growth ('Lemon Sparkler'). Chief Joseph Lodgepole Pine (*Pinus contorta* 'Chief Joseph', 20') turns a vivid gold in winter, while Siberian Cedar (*Microbiota decussata*, 2') and Red Star Cedar (*Chamaecyparis thyoides* 'Red Star', 15') both turn reddish-purple in winter.
14. Colorful Cones: The reproductive structures of conifers are often brightly colored. Yellow English Yew (*Taxus baccata* 'Lutea', 30') has bright yellow berries. Male cones of Celery Pine (*Phyllocladus alpinus*, 18') are bright red, while female cones of Korean Fir (*Abies koreana*, 15') are blue. In Caucasian Spruce (*Picea orientalis*, 50'), the cones are covered in white resin.
15. Colorful Cones: Plum Yew (*Cephalotaxus harringtonii*, 5') cones are fleshy and salmon-pink, while those of our native Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*, 80') are quite colorful when young. Alerce (*Fitzroya cupressoides*, 20') immature cones are pink, while those of tamarack (*Larix laricina*, 20') are bright purple. Cone color is usually short-lived, as cones often mature to brown, but that makes colorful cones a sought-after treat.
16. Beautiful Bark: Conifer bark is seldom brightly colored, but subtle shades are nevertheless welcome, especially in winter. Lacebark pine (*Pinus bungeana*, 30') is perhaps the most showy, though slow to develop. Giant Sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*, 160') is famous for its red bark, though too large for most gardens. Austrian Pine (*Pinus nigra*, 40') has grey to red mottling, while Alligator Juniper (*Juniperus deppeana*, 20') has a scaly bark texture.
17. Conifer Companions: Conifers can be planted with almost anything, but deciduous plants make great companions as they contrast in texture and during winter, the contrast increases. Most hardy grasses have a texture quite different to the more rigid architecture of conifers and choosing plants with softer shapes often accentuates the conifer's form. Alternatively, choose ultra-formal shapes, including topiary. Conifers often look most striking in winter, once other plants have died down, so pair them with early spring bloomers, such as snowdrops and hellebores for a stunning show. Lastly, most conifers are deer-resistant.
18. Conifers in the Landscape: Conifers can be used in many different ways, but as specimen or statement plants, they really stand out. Larger species make fine backdrops and some can be used as hedges or screens. Dwarf varieties work well in containers, while prostrate forms make perfect ground covers. Larger species also form a useful canopy in the woodland garden.
19. Choosing Colorful Conifers: Make sure to mix evergreen and deciduous species, to broaden the color palette, and choose contrasting foliage textures. Consider the full year of display, to



include conifers that are colorful in different seasons. Winter is conifer prime time, so plant them where you'll be able to enjoy them in the coldest season, and don't forget to check on final sizes before choosing.

Plant List

1. *Cryptomeria japonica* 'Nana Albospica' (GH3)
2. *Thuja plicata* (T23)
3. *Metasequoia* 'Gold Rush', *Picea mariana* 'Nana', *Taxodium distichum* (098)
4. *Platycladus* 'Franky Boy', *Podocarpus* 'Kilworth Cream', *Cryptomeria* 'Tansu' (071)
5. *Larix decidua* 'Pendula' (081)
6. *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Aurea Nana', *Cryptomeria japonica* 'Nana' (80)
7. *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Sunlight Lace' (082, 083)
8. *Pinus strobus* 'Pendula' (084)
9. *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Tetragona Aurea' (078)
10. *Thujopsis dolabrata* 'Nana' (072)
11. *Taxus baccata* 'Black Rod' (057)
12. *Picea omorika* 'Extreme Weeper' (060)
13. *Xanthocyparis vietnamensis*, *Podocarpus nivalis* (051)
14. *Cupressus macrocarpa* 'Lutea' (052)
15. *Abies procera* 'Pendula' (045)
16. *Saxegothaea conspicua* (21)
17. *Thuja plicata* 'Zebrina' (004)
18. *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Stewartii' (003)
19. *Abies lasiocarpa* 'Glauca Compacta', *Juniperus recurva* var. *coxii* (002)
20. *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Argentea Compacta' (large pot)
21. *Sequoia sempervirens* 'Henderson Blue', *Podocarpus lawrencei* 'Purple King' (001)
22. *Thujopsis dolabrata*, *Picea purpurea* (PL1)