

# Provocative Conifers

*It's not the Juniper your Mother used to Know!*

By Dave Dunn

Rideau Woodland Ramble

There was a time when the evergreens we had to choose from for the garden were limited to the same old junipers and spruce we have all been used to for the last 100 years! It's not that way any longer, and today, you can truly say you have a wide choice of some pretty provocative conifers.



What's a conifer....well, I am talking about evergreens. Some are deciduous, and lose their needles in the fall, like the larch or the redwood, and some are broadleaf, such as the rhododendrons, and most keep their needles and colour all year round. They represent a family of plants that include the oldest living things on this planet. They also represent a family that can live in a vast range of conditions, and include some of the largest and some of the smallest things on earth!...already pretty provocative.

Evergreens love moisture, but do not like their feet being wet. It's a very good idea to water them well in the fall right up to freeze up to help them fight off the drying effects of sun and wind all winter long. They have to keep their needles green and healthy all winter. They don't have the benefit that deciduous trees have of dropping their leaves and replacing every year. With this in mind, it's always a good idea to give new conifers some winter protection in their first year or two while they are developing a full root system.



So what is really so provocative about conifers today? You can get gold ones, blue ones, red-tipped ones, variegated ones, ....you can find weeping forms, dwarf forms, upright columnar forms, globose (round) forms, and just about everything in between. With this being the case, you can find a conifer to solve just about any problem. They re great for creating the “bones” of the garden, providing a backdrop, or anchor or feature around which to plant. In doing so, you have elements that are always present and always a strong visual element.



“Mother Lode Juniper” is an ultra gold carpet Juniper that only growth about an inch high. Consider having it wrap around a dwarf green “Balsam”. Beside the balsam, you can provide contrast with a golden globe cedar, and shock with a large weeping Norway spruce. For fun, add a Montgomery blue spruce. Just in this small patch, you have multiples colours shapes and forms, all with conifers, looking good 365 days a year and no maintenance! The list goes on.....Fir give you a needle that is white underneath. Serbian spruces have a bi-colour needle that shimmers. Taylor’s Sunburst Lodgepole Pines look like they are flowering in spring. Look for cool new introductions like Cobra, or Baby Blue Eyes, Humpty Dumpty, Elf or Pixie spruce. Your garden will be a conversation piece, and everyone will say you have some pretty provocative conifers!

Dave Dunn