

Smaller conifers

The RHS is the International Cultivar Registration Authority for conifers, and maintains a large collection at RHS Garden Wisley. Curator Matt Pottage has a particular interest in this plant group, and has selected the following as his Top 5 conifers for smaller gardens:

- 1 *Abies koreana* 'Ice Breaker'
- 2 *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Wissel's Saguaro'
- 3 *Juniperus procumbens* 'Nana'
- 4 *Sciadopitys verticillata* 'Picola'
- 5 *Pinus nigra* 'Bright Eyes'

All these cultivars should remain under 2m (6½ft) after ten years.

More about conifers

RHS Encyclopedia of Conifers (2013), by Aris Auders and Derek Spicer
Conifers (2013), by Andrew Mikolajski
Dwarf and Slow-growing Conifers (1993), by John Bond and Lyn Randall
Designing with Conifers (2011), by Richard Bitner



To find out more about conifer care, search on "conifer" at rhs.org.uk/advice



For advice on particular problems, members can also email queries to gardeningsadvice@rhs.org.uk



Conifer care



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Front cover: *Larix kaempferi* 'Blue Rabbit Weeping'. All photos © RHS except *Taxodium distichum* (© Carol Sheppard).

Don't let *leylandii* put you off growing conifers

They're valuable garden features with diverse forms offering vertical pillars, cascading ground cover and tortured silhouettes. Most important is their stalwart year-round interest.

Cultivation

Conifers are not generally demanding. Water new purchases until established. Mulch annually in late winter to conserve moisture, after applying a general purpose fertiliser.

Conifers need little pruning. Most will not regrow from old wood if you prune into this. Exceptions include yew and less reliably, *Thuja*. Otherwise trim to a green finish from spring to late summer. In variegated or coloured plants, do prune out shoots that are just green and take out shoots sprouting from below grafts.

The term 'dwarf conifer' is often misapplied, since slow-growing conifers become large in time. Either lightly trim or remove the growing tip, though replacement is often best to maintain scale.

Right, top to bottom: *Pinus coulterii* cone, *Ginkgo biloba* 'California Sunset', *Pinus bungeana* bark, *Larix decidua*, *Taxodium distichum*, *Picea abies* 'Acrocona'.

Conifers – they may surprise you

Did you know...

- ◆ Britain has three native conifers: common juniper, Scots pine and yew.
- ◆ Not all conifers bear cones. The seeds of some like yew and *Podocarpus* are encased in a fleshy 'fruit'.
- ◆ Most conifers are evergreen. Notable exceptions include the European larch (*Larix decidua* var. *decidua*) with its pretty new growth.
- ◆ Many dwarf conifers originate from witches' brooms, slow-growing mutations triggered by insects or fungi. These clustered growths may then be grafted or root cuttings taken.
- ◆ Kooky cones – try *Abies koreana*, with youthful purple cones; *Pinus pinea*, for homegrown pine nuts; *Pseudotsuga menziesii* 'Glauca Pendula' for feathered cones.
- ◆ Tactile texture – try *Pinus bungeana* with its mottled bark, starry new growth on *Sciadopitys verticillata* 'Picola' and soft tiers of spreading *Picea abies* 'Nidiformis'.
- ◆ Technicolour trees – evergreens can change colour in winter. Start with *Cryptomeria japonica* 'Elegans Compacta' (red-bronze), *Microbiota decussata* (deep bronze) and *Chamaecyparis thyoides* 'Rubicon' (purple).