Dwarf Conifers and Other Dwarf Ornamentals: Their Use in the Landscape

Why Dwarf Conifers and Dwarf Ornamentals?

- Long lifespan in the garden
- Take up little space
- Management/Maintenance is done with both feet on the ground
- Many species live in pots
Attributes of dwarf conifers in containers

- They are easily transported from one part of the garden to another
- Evergreen forms provide much needed color/textured and form in the winter landscape.
- Some of the larger dwarfs end up bonsaiing themselves naturally in pots due to root restriction
- Once established, they require the moisture requirements of the rest of the garden

Growing requirements: Light

- Full sun to half a day is required
- If only half a day you can choose between morning and afternoon.
- Note: With dwarf flowering ornamentals, they prefer more than half a day of sun.
Growing requirements: Water

- With permanent plantings in the garden, water twice a week for the first 4 to 6 weeks, after the initial time period, drop back to once a week.
- With pots and container gardening, water twice a week for the first 4 to 6 weeks and once a week thereafter through November 15 through the 30th.
- Note: containers will need to be checked for water needs throughout the winter.

Growing requirements: Fertilization

- With dwarf conifers, they can go without fertilizer every other year.
- Application is early April: soil has to warm up so the fertilizer is used.
- Use an organic fertilizer like Hollytone.
- With all other dwarf ornamentals, feed in early April, Hollytone or Plant tone for example.
Growing requirements: fertilization

- Rates: established plantings, ½ cup to 1 cup per plant
- Spread around the plant’s drip line
- If mulch is present, after application scratch it in.
- You can feed from April through June*
- Past June, new growth flares up and does not harden off before the hard freeze in November.

Growing requirements: Mulch

- No more than 2 inches of pine bark, needles, compost, rice hulls etc.
- Warning: keep mulch away from the base of the plants, and do not cover the lower branches.
Growing requirements: Pruning Dwarf Conifers

- Remove ½ of the new growth on species that produce candles
- Remove any dead wood
- Remove crossing branches
- Remove undesirable reversion growth.
- Use bypass pruners, and clean pruners of sap as you go

Growing requirements: Pruning Dwarf Flowering Ornamentals

- Remove dead wood
- Remove crossing branches
- With “cut back” shrubs, up to 2/3rds of the height can be removed
- Only remove the dead out of Macrophylla type hydrangeas
- Thin out 1/3 of the blooming stalks that are left on plants like buddlea
Potting

- Any containers work: troughs
- Plastic looking terracotta works great, no cracking
- Use a high organic potting mix, that drains well.
- Soak the root ball to remove air pockets
- After planting, cover and mulch with gravel or wood chips, no more than an inch.

Hardiness factors to consider:

- Dwarf conifers and other ornamentals that are in above ground planters year round:
- Must be listed 2 zones colder than the zone you live in in order for plants to survive the winter.
- In zone 7 we can only successfully use plants that are zone 5 and above, in zone 6 plants that are listed zone 4 and above.
**Picea abies “Farnsburg”**

These are plants grouped together as dwarf conifers

Setting up an area in the garden for several plants without competition is best. They are able to be best viewed. Note the wood chips as mulch.

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**Pinus parviflora ‘M par 6’**

Dwarf form of a Japanese white pine

10 year dimensions 2 ft. x 2 ft.
*Picea omorika* “Aurea”  
Dwarf Serbian Spruce  
As this plant matures, it gets more golden in color.

*Pinus strobus* “Torulosa #3”  
Contorted Eastern white pine
**Pinus pumila “Blue Dwarf”**

Dwarf Japanese stone pine
Selected for a spring of carmine-red cones that contrast with the superior color of the needles
3 to 6” a year, garden size, 3 feet high x 6 feet high.

**Pinus parviflora “Nellie D”**

“Nellie D” dwarf Japanese white pine
2 ft. x 2 ft. over 10 years
**Chamaecyparis obtusa “Intermedia”**

Dwarf Hinoki Cypress, grows 3 to 6 feet in height.

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**Abies koreana “Silberperl”**

Buds resemble silver pearls. As it ages, plant produces a central leader grows at the rate of 2-3 inches per year, creating a squat conical evergreen.
**Pinus parviflora “Ogon janome”**
Variegated Japanese white pine: super prized plant 10’Height x 8’width

**Pinus koraiensis “Blue Ball”**
Blue Korean pine
**Picea omorika “Tremonia”**
Miniature Serbian spruce, found as a witches’ broom in Germany, 8” x 12” over 10 years

**Picea abies “Pygmea”**
Dwarf Norway spruce, irregular habit, 3’ in 10 years
Abies procera “Pospisil”
Dwarf blue spruce

Pinus sylvestris “Dana Kellerman”
Dwarf Scotch pine, globe shaped and grows 4” per year, blue needles
**Pinus heldreichii “Smidtii”**
Dense globose selection of the Bosnian pine. 2 feet tall in 25 years

**Picea abies “Tompa”**
Norway spruce: 2 to 4” per year. Resembles Alberta Spruce and is a superior alternative.
**Thuja orientalis “Kyushu”**

Chinese arborvitae, new, glows in the dark. Kyushu is a Japanese Island.

**Picea likiangensis var. balfouriana “Mittenwald”**

Mittenwald spruce, 3 feet wide by 3.5 feet high, over 10 year
*Abies alba “Dunovice”*

Dwarf European silver fir.

*Pinus sylvestris “Green Penguin”*

Scotch pine, “Green Penguin” grows 3 to 4 feet tall and 1 to 2’ wide. Fun plant.
*Thuja plicata* “Whipcord”

Height 4 to 5’, width 4 to 5’ and tolerates being under black walnuts. (Juglone, prevents most plants from growing under them.)

*Pinus parviflora* “Jim’s Mini Curl”

Jim’s Mini Curl Japanese White Pine. 12” by 10” over 10 years
Pinus sylvestris “Nerosi WB”
Dwarf Scotch pine

Picea abies “Lemonade”
Lemonade Norway spruce, 4.5 feet tall x 3 feet wide.
**Picea orientalis “Professor Langner”**

One of the smallest selections of oriental spruce. Grows less than 1 inch per year. Professor Langner of Germany found the seedling in 1976.

**Picea engelmannii “Blue Magoo”**

In the spring, the new growth “weeps” and then later stiffens, 6 to 9” per year, 7’ x 4’ over 10 years.
**Abies nordmanniana “Dahlheim”**

One of the dwarf Nordmann or Caucasian firs. Develops into a shrub, wider than high, 2 x 3’ in 10 years.

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**Buddlea Beauty to Behold Series, Blue chip, Purple Haze, Pink micro chip and Blue chip Jr.**

The above buddleas grow 3’ tall by 3’ wide and are hard pruned in the spring (March through May). They flower most of the summer, and if deadheaded into the fall which hits the Monarch butterfly migration.
Duetzia gracilis “Nikko,” Cherry Pink, Crème fraiche, Chardonnay pearls

Duetzias form neat mounds in the garden, flowering for a month. Fall color is amazing. Very little pruning necessary. Be careful of layering in the spring as the outer branches tend to do so.

Dwarf Lilac, Miss Canada, Lil’Kim, and Palibin

The dwarf lilacs are 3’ tall by 4’
Hydrangea “Ruby Dwarf” oakleaf, Hydrangea “Quick Fire,” Hydrangea BoBo, Hydrangea Pistachio.

These all grow 3’ tall x 4’ wide.


Hydrangea “Zebra” has black stems, “Forever Pink” is always pink, in acidic and alkaline soils, “Tuff Stuff” is an ever blooming form, and “Little Lime” is a dwarf “Lime Light”.

Infinitive series of Crape Myrtles, “Magenta,” “Brite Pink,” and “Orchid”

These are low mounding Crape Myrtles that grow 3’ tall and 3 to 4’ wide. They bloom their heads off.

Abelia japonica, and Ninebark

These two flower and maintain heights of 3 feet and a width of 3 feet.
A corner garden up against the house, a concrete planter

Plants arranged so they work together in the landscape.
Three dwarfs in a planter forever.

A section of dwarf conifers
This allows for plants to grow alongside each other in a manner that they do not overpower.
Another view from the back
Note the proportion and that plants have their own space. Very important for keeping everything healthy. Crowding kills.

Another section of the garden where the dwarf conifers have reached their mature size.
Note there is still ample room to grow in over the long haul
*Picea orientalis “Aureospicata”*

An amazing dwarf conifer