

USING CONIFERS IN THE GARDEN

Few gardens rely solely on flowers for year-round interest; they also need a structure of different plant shapes, colours and textures to provide a background and maintain year-round appeal. Conifers are ideal because they are available in so many forms, are hardy, easy to care for and long-living.

- **Hedges** in a variety of growth rates and colour give privacy, provide habitats for wildlife, absorb traffic noise and pollution, screen unsightly objects and create a backdrop for the garden (see our leaflet *Making Gardens Beneficial to Wildlife* for advice on planting a hedge).
- **Ground cover** can be provided by fast- or slow-growing prostrate conifers used to edge ponds, paths or borders; cover unsightly areas; and suppress weeds. They can act as a foil for bulbs, flowers and grasses.
- **Specimens** planted in the centre of a lawn, in a corner, in a tub or in a border or rockery can add structural interest to a garden.
- **Containers:** miniature and dwarf conifers suit container planting and will last five years or more in the same pot with a minimum of attention. Just water in summer, give an

occasional trim and an annual feed of slow-release fertiliser. Low troughs can be underplanted with miniature bulbs and bedding plants. Plant a single conifer in patio planters to give height or a combination of different shapes, textures and colours for an all-round display. Use prostrate junipers in place of trailing plants.

- **Borders** can benefit from the graceful, arching foliage of pendulous conifers or upright-growing specimens. Plant with other shrubs, phormiums, heathers or grasses for a long-lasting border.
- **Water features:** conifers are excellent planted beside water as their strong shapes make wonderful reflections. They also hide the edges of pond liners and break up fixed lines of vision.
- **Mixed plantings:** conifers can be used with other plants to give year-round interest and colour: dwarf conifers live happily alongside other plants in containers, or by themselves as specimens. Try them with winter bedding and early spring bulbs and flowers, which can then be swapped for summer bedding. Heathers and hardy cyclamen also make a great combination.



WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Bucket
- Fork
- Spade
- Soil conditioner (peat, coir, well-rotted compost)
- Slow-release fertiliser
- Secateurs or shears
- Coniferous plants

For more information:
www.rhs.org.uk/advice
www.plantforlife.info

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It is dedicated to providing services, products, advice and information to help support and promote the business activities of garden retailers, growers, landscapers, wholesalers, manufacturers and service providers in the UK.

- HTA Specialist Groups - HTA Tree and Hedging Group; Association of British Conifer Growers visit www.conifers.org.uk
- Tel: 0118 930 3132 or visit www.the-hta.org.uk
- PlantforLife - visit www.plantforlife.info



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THE EASY GUIDE TO

GROWING CONIFERS



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CONIFERS

Conifers come in a vast range of colours and many change shade during the year. Careful choice can give you a great splash of colour in autumn and winter when most other plants are dormant.

Size is determined by variety and not by size at planting. Most plant labels carry a 10-year height as part of the description. Generally:

- d = dwarf, under 40cm in 10 years
- s = slow, under 1m in 10 years
- m = medium, up to 2m in 10 years
- f = fast, anything above that.

Growth rates vary: some grow quickly straight away (x *Cuprocyparis leylandii*) but then need to be kept in check; others are very slow for a time and then grow rapidly (*Araucaria araucana* - monkey puzzle); while some barely grow more than 2cm a year (*Picea mariana* 'Nana' - spruce).

CHOOSING & PLANTING

PREPARATION & PLANTING TIME: 30 MINS

Conifers will tolerate most soils, but avoid planting in areas that water-log regularly, except for *Taxodium distichum* (swamp cypress) and *Metasequoia* (dawn redwood). A very chalky soil will suit *Taxus* (yew), some junipers and pines. Local climate, such as areas of high or low rainfall, can affect height and spread. To help you choose the right conifer for your garden, see our list of plants opposite or ask your nursery or garden centre.

Before planting, remove the tree from the pot and soak the rootball in a bucket of water for about 10 minutes. Clear the area of weeds.

Make the planting hole about twice the size of the rootball; the top of the rootball should be just 2.5cm below ground level.

Refill the planting hole with the original soil mixed with peat, coir or very well-rotted compost. Do not use nitrogenous fertilisers such as poultry or horse manure or bedding plant compost which often contains fast-release fertiliser, which can damage conifer roots. One or two feeds with a slow-release fertiliser is quite enough to maintain growth.

Give enough water to keep the rootball moist but not waterlogged in the early years after planting.

Conifers also grow well in pots.



RECOMMENDED PLANTS

There are over 1,000 different conifer cultivars to choose from, so if you can't find a specific variety, there will be alternatives. When buying conifers for a certain position, choose suitable plants based on height, colour and growth habit rather than trying to remember a long Latin name. Below is a list of some of the more popular cultivars, or you can see what's available at your local garden centre or nursery, or visit www.conifers.org.uk

HEDGING

- Green *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Green Hedger' m, x *Cuprocyparis leylandii* f, *Taxus baccata* m, *Thuja plicata* 'Atrovirens' f, *T. occidentalis* Emerald m & 'Brabant' f
- Yellow/gold *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Stardust' m, x *Cuprocyparis leylandii* 'Castlewellan' f & 'Gold Rider' f, *Cupressus macrocarpa* 'Goldcrest' f, *Taxus baccata* golden varieties m, *Thuja occidentalis* 'Sunkist' m
- Blue/grey *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Chilworth Silver' m & 'Pembury Blue' m, *Cupressus arizonica* 'Blue Ice' f & var. *glabra* f
- Variiegated/white tipped *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Summer Snow' m & 'Argenteovariegata' m, x *Cuprocyparis leylandii* 'Harlequin' f, *Thuja plicata* 'Zebrina' m
- Winter colour *Cryptomeria japonica* Elegans Group f & Elegans Compacta m

COLUMN (fastigiata)

- Green *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* Ellwood's Pillar s, 'Grayswood Feather' m, 'Green Pillar' m, and 'Little Spire' m, *Cupressus sempervirens* 'Totem Pole' m, *Taxus baccata* 'Fastigiata' m
- Yellow/gold *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Ellwood's Gold' m, *Cupressus macrocarpa* 'Wilma' m, *C. sempervirens* 'Swanes Gold' s, *Juniperus communis* 'Gold Cone' s, *Taxus baccata* 'Standishi' s
- Blue/grey *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Pelt's Blue' f, *Juniperus communis* 'Compressa' d, *J. scopulorum* 'Blue Arrow' m, *Pinus sylvestris* Fastigiata Group m
- Variiegated/white tipped *Juniperus scopulorum* 'Silver Star' m, *Taxus baccata* 'Fastigiata Aureomarginata' s, 'Icicle' d & 'Ivory Tower' s

CONICAL (pyramidal)

- Green *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Ellwoodii' m, x *Cuprocyparis leylandii* 'Olive's Green' f, *Picea glauca* var. *albertiana* 'Conica' m & 'Laurin' d, *Thuja occidentalis* 'Holmstrup' m
- Yellow/gold *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Minima Aurea' s, 'Springtime' s & 'Yvonne' m, *Thuja occidentalis* 'Yellow Ribbon' m
- Blue/grey *Abies lasiocarpa* 'Compacta' m, *Cupressus arizonica* 'Pyramidalis' m, *Juniperus chinensis* 'Pyramidalis' m, *Picea glauca* Alberta Blue s & 'Sanders Blue' s, *P. pungens* 'Hoopsii' m & Glauca Group m
- Variiegated/white tipped *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Fleckellwood' m, 'Snow White' m & 'Summer Snow' m, *Juniperus chinensis* 'Variiegata' m, *Picea glauca* 'J. W. Daisy's White' s
- Bronze/purple/*Chamaecyparis thyoides* 'Ericoides' s, 'Rubicon' s & winter colour 'Top Point' s



TRIMMING & PRUNING

Correctly chosen, most conifers only need a light clip in late summer with secateurs or shears to keep the shape correct - even x *Cuprocyparis leylandii* just require an annual trim, preferably in July. Junipers benefit from occasional radical pruning and most reshoot from the old wood. But don't let them get too large before pruning or you'll have unsightly brown wood for a year or two.



BUSHY

- Green *Abies balsamea* Hudsonia Group d, *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Nana Gracilis' s, *Pinus mugo* varieties s, *Tsuga canadensis* 'Jeddeloh' s
- Yellow/gold *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Fernspray Gold' m, 'Nana' d, 'Nana Aurea' s & 'Nana Lutea' s, *C. pisifera* 'Filifera Nana' s & 'Sungold' s, *Pinus densiflora* 'Alice Verkade' m, *Thuja occidentalis* 'Rheingold' s, *T. plicata* 'Whipcord' m
- Blue/grey *Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Boulevard' m & 'Squarrosa Lombarts' m, *Juniperus* 'Grey Owl' m, *J. squamata* 'Blue Star' d
- Variiegated/white tipped *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Nana Albospica' s, *C. pisifera* 'Snowflake' d, *Cryptomeria japonica* 'Sekkan-sugi' m, *J. x pfitzeriana* 'Sulphur Spray' m
- Bronze/purple/*Cryptomeria japonica* 'Elegans Compacta' s, *Juniperus horizontalis* 'Andorra Compact' d, *Podocarpus 'Blaze'* d & 'County Park Fire' d, *Platyclusus orientalis* 'Rosedalis' s

BALL (globose)

- Green *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Gnome' d, 'Green Globe' d & 'Minima Glauca' s, *Picea abies* 'Little Gem' d, *P. glauca* 'Alberta Globe' d, *Thuja occidentalis* 'Danica' d
- Yellow/gold *Platyclusus orientalis* 'Aurea Nana' s, *Thuja occidentalis* 'Amber Glow' d, 'Golden Globe' s & 'Golden Tuffet' d
- Blue/grey *Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Curly Tops' s, *Picea mariana* 'Nana' d, *P. pungens* 'Globosa' s
- Variiegated/white tipped *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Pygmaea Argentea' d, *C. pisifera* 'Nana Aureovariegata' d & 'Plumosa Compressa' d, *Cryptomeria japonica* 'Golden Promise' d
- Bronze/purple/*Cryptomeria japonica* 'Compressa' d & 'Vilmoriniana' d, winter colour *Thuja occidentalis* 'Teddy' d

GROUND COVER (prostrate/semi-prostrate) (growth rates refer to width)

- Green *Juniperus communis* 'Green Carpet' s, 'Hornbrookii' m & 'Repanda' m, *J. x pfitzeriana* 'Mint Julep' m, *J. rigida* subsp. *conferta* m, *J. sabina* 'Tamariscifolia' m
- Yellow/gold *Juniperus horizontalis* 'Golden Carpet' d, *J. x pfitzeriana* 'Carberry Gold' m, 'Gold Coast' m & Golden Joy' s
- Blue/grey *Cedrus deodara* 'Feelin' Blue' m, *Juniperus horizontalis* 'Blue Chip' m & Glauca Group m, *J. squamata* 'Blue Carpet' m
- Variiegated/white tipped *Juniperus chinensis* 'Expansa Aureospicata' m, white tipped *J. squamata* 'Holger' s, *Taxus baccata* 'Repens Aurea' m
- Bronze/purple/*Juniperus horizontalis* 'Andorra Compact' s & 'Winter Blue' m, winter colour *Microbiota decussata* m, *Taxus baccata* 'Corleys Coppertip' m