

In the previous issue of Conifer Corner, I introduced the Cupressaceae or cypress family. This family consists of evergreen trees and shrubs that are characterized by having flattened or scale-like leaves. It includes a wide variety of trees that are important in landscape, forestry, and conservation systems. Last time I discussed members of the Cupressaceae that are commonly referred to as “cypresses” or “false cypresses” such as the genus *Chamaecyparis*. In this issue I’ll present trees and shrubs that are often referred to as “cedars” or “redcedars”. This includes the genera *Thuja* and *Juniperus*, which, botanically speaking, are not true cedars (see sidebar).

THE CEDAR

Thuja: One of the remnants of my forestry training is that I still refer to *Thuja plicata* as Western redcedar and *Thuja occidentalis* as Northern white-cedar, although I've been around horticulturists long enough that I've become conditioned to using arborvitae as a common name. Interestingly, the common name arborvitae (meaning "tree of life") comes from the fact that Native Americans taught early French explorers to use foliage from *Thuja occidentalis* to prevent scurvy. By almost any measure, the number of arborvitae cultivars in the nursery trade is staggering. The American Conifer Society Database lists over 150 cultivars of *Thuja occidentalis* and Michael Dirr Lists 40 cultivars of *Thuja plicata*. The vast number of cultivated varieties is a testament to great variability with the two species as well as their relative ease of propagation by rooted cuttings. In the trade arborvitae are often distinguished simply by cultivar and frequently little attention is paid to whether a cultivar is *T. plicata* or *T. occidentalis* although Dirr suggests that *T. plicata* is superior from an ornamental standpoint.

Thuja plicata: In its native range western redcedar is a massive tree. The National Champion western redcedar is over 150' tall and nearly 20' in diameter. This species is highly valued for its decay resistant lumber and is widely used for shakes and shingles. The tree is referred to as the cornerstone of Native American culture in the Pacific Northwest. Native Americans used the trunks of western redcedar for dug-

out canoes and pounded the tree's stringy bark smooth for clothing and even diapers for their infants. While today most parents prefer Pampers™ to pounding bark, there are many *T. plicata* cultivars that are used in landscaping.

'Elegantissima': This cultivar is rated as an intermediate grower by the American Conifer Society (6"-12" per year). Chub notes: "This is an upright form that is doing very well at the Heartland Collection in Clinton, Iowa." (Zone 5)

'Virescens': Another *T. plicata* with an upright habit; dark green tree with an elegant form (Variously listed as Zone 4 or 5)

'Excelsa': Another of Chub's favorites that is doing well at the Heartland Collection (Zone 5)

Thuja occidentalis: Eastern arborvitae or northern white-cedar is the eastern cousin of *T. plicata*. The main range of northern white-cedar extends through the southern part of the eastern half of Canada and the adjacent northern part of the United States. In Michigan this species occurs throughout Michigan's Upper Peninsula, in the northern half of the Lower Peninsula, and along the Lake Michigan shore. As mentioned previously, this species includes a wide array of cultivars that range in size from dwarf conifers to large trees and span the range of forms from creeping to columnar. A note of caution, many popular globe forms of arborvitae such as 'Golden Globe' and 'Rheingold' are attractive landscape plants when young but often have trouble withstanding snow-loads as they get larger. Many of the upright forms will hold up better through years of Michigan winters.

'Degroots Spire': This columnar form can be planted as a single specimen or used in narrow situations for screening. (Zone 4)

'Smaragd': The trade name is often

listed as 'Emerald Green'. This is a dark green, upright to fastigate form. Chub notes: "This is the only arborvitae to crack my list of 25 favorite conifers." (Zone 4)

'Hetz Wintergreen': Conical, narrow, upright, robust growing, with compact bright green foliage; tends to grow with a strong central leader without special training; excellent year-round screen (Zone 3)

'Sunkist': Striking bright yellow to golden; fast growing, dense, broad, conical plant; one of the best in this color class; Chub notes: "It's a dandy. Train to a single leader." (Zone 3)

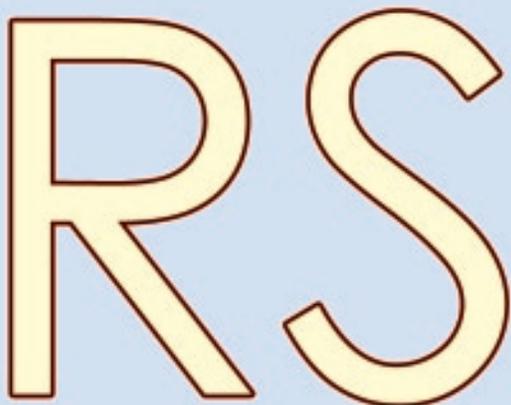
'Holmstrup': Upright, intermediate grower (6"-12" per year); medium green color; Chub notes: "Need to keep this as a single leader when young. If you let it do it's own thing, you'll have trouble with heavy, wet snows." (Zone 4)

'Recurva Nana': Dark green with a mounding form; Chub notes: "One of the best. Less problem with snow loads than many of the globe forms." (Zone 3)

Juniperus: This genus includes about 50 species, 11 of which are native to North America including Eastern redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) and Rocky Mountain juniper (*J. scopulorum*). Both species are commonly grown in conservation nurseries and they are important trees for conservation forestry plantings such as windbreaks and living snow fences. Eastern redcedar wood is highly valued for its scent and decay resistance. And, of course, juniper berries are responsible for the characteristic flavor of gin. Although named cultivars of *J. virginiana* and *J. scopulorum* have been developed, most of the Junipers in the landscape trade are exotics.

Juniperus squamata

'Prostrata': Prostrate, ground-covering form with blue foliage that



eventually mounds in the center; Chub notes: “This has proven one of the best prostrate forms of junipers for the Midwest because of its resistance to *Phomopsis* tip blight.” (Zone 4)

Juniperus horizontalis: This species includes nearly 60 cultivars but many begin to look shabby with age due to *Phomopsis* blight.

‘**Blue Rug**’: This is a nice blue-green, ground-hugging juniper for spilling over rocks or as a perimeter plant. (Zone 3)

‘**Mother Lode**’: Bright yellow ground hugging form; excellent groundcover; relatively low-maintenance once established (Zone 3)

‘**Venusta**’: Striking prostrate form (Zone 5)

Juniperus chinensis: Often fast growers; Chub notes: “Be careful with *chinensis*, they often get too big and can overwhelm a landscape.”

‘**Saybrook Gold**’: Gold color of the new growth is set against a background of green and gold variegation on older needles; slight orange cast to the winter color; (Zone 4)

Thuja occidentalis ‘Degroots Spire’

‘**Robusta Green**’: Versatile and durable landscape plant for accent, windbreak or screen for narrow spaces; irregular columnar form; (Zone 4)

Juniperus communis

‘**Effusa**’: A spreading juniper with shiny foliage that grows 15"–18" tall; (Zone 3)

‘**Compressa**’: Very narrow upright form; slow growing (1"–6" year); a good choice for rock gardens; (Zone 4)

Juniperus sabina

‘**Calgary Carpet**’: Compact, spreading evergreen with attractive soft green foliage; excellent low-growing accent shrub; (Zone 3)

‘**Skandia**’: spreading, densely branched ground cover useful for border or rock garden accent; very durable in the landscape; holds its bright green color well through winter (Zone 3) 

True Cedars. Although many members of the family Cupressaceae are commonly referred to as cedars, botanically speaking none of them can truly call themselves cedars. True cedars (genus *Cedrus*) are needled conifers that are actually members of the pinaceae family. *Cedrus* species are characterized by needles borne on short shoots in tufts of 20–30, much like larches. The genus includes four species: deodar cedar, which is a popular ornamental in Europe and milder parts of the US such as the Pacific Northwest; Atlas cedar (*Cedrus atlantica*), Cypress cedar (*Cedrus brevifolia*) and Cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*). Cedars are large stately trees and their foliage gives them a unique characteristic. Unfortunately, cold winter temperatures limit the use of true cedars in Michigan. A subspecies of *Cedrus libani* (ssp. *stenocoma*) is hardy to zone 5 and there is a wonderful, large specimen at Hidden Lake Gardens in Tipton, Michigan.



Justin “Chub” Harper is widely known as one of the leading experts on garden conifers in the United States. The Harper Collection of Dwarf and Rare Conifers at MSU’s Hidden Lake Gardens is nationally recognized. Each “Conifer Corner” includes Chub’s notes on his favorite (and not so favorite) conifers.

