



Satisfying in small spaces

Trees, conifers and weepers that fit the bill with beauty, versatility and easy maintenance

BY TRACY ILENE MILLER

SMALLER YARDS HAVEN'T changed homeowners' need for shade or beauty. But, they have changed what will fit into a yard, which has changed the market and by extension, growers' business focus.

We asked growers to share favorite selections of small trees, conifers and weepers that fit today's yard while still providing benefits of versatility, beauty, easy maintenance and in some cases, drought tolerance.

Small trees

Burgundy Jewel vine maple (*Acer circinatum* 'Burgundy Jewel'; Zones 4–8) bumps up the utility and adaptability of native vine maples in urban settings, said Richie Steffen, director and curator of the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden (Seattle, Washington). In the spring, leaves emerge with a deep reddish-purple color that holds through summer, followed by a vibrant red finish in fall. As a low branching, multi-stemmed tree, this tree will stay under 20 feet tall for many years.

"We have grown ours in a large container for several years, and it has become a beautiful vase-shaped specimen," Steffen said.

Sister Ghost (*Acer palmatum* 'Sister Ghost'; Zones 5–9) has unique variegation, which emerges as a pale creamy white with green veins and glows gracefully in the landscape.

"As it ages," Steffen said, "the creamy white color will go to chartreuse and then to pale light green, but the veins will always keep their color." In the fall, red, orange and yellow highlights emerge. For partial to dappled shade, it matures at 6–8 feet tall and grows well in containers up to six years.

Suminagashi (*Acer palmatum* 'Suminagashi'; Zones 5–9) is a slow-growing, deeply cut red-leaf cultivar. It stands approximately 18 feet tall after 25 years of growth at the Miller Garden.

"It comes out this really bright red, and then tones down to a greenish bronze, not as dark as 'Bloodgood,' and then in the fall, it erupts into flaming red," Steffen said. "With a little sun, the ground glows red. It's an older cultivar that should be out there more than it is."

Fox Valley® dwarf river birch (*Betula nigra* 'Little King' Fox Valley; Zones 4–9) is an absolutely charming miniature version of birch that will fit into nearly any garden," Steffen said. Very resistant to bronze birch borer, it has salmon, ivory



Small spaces

Previous page: The display garden at Peace of Mind Nursery (Silverton, Oregon) showcases their offerings. PHOTO COURTESY OF PEACE OF MIND NURSERY

and fawn-colored peeling bark and is a moderate grower when young that slows once it matures, reaching only 12 to 15 feet tall. It tolerates drought and heavy clay soils, but will also grow well in wet soils.

Ruby Falls redbud (*Cercis canadensis* 'Ruby Falls' PP22097; Zones 5–9) is made to offer color, according to Sandy Dittmar, consumer marketing representative for Iseli Nursery (Boring, Oregon). With cascading, wavy branches of bright pink flowers in spring, and heart-shaped leaves that emerge with a deep purple-red color, the tree then matures to have green undertones. The bright red foliage in fall adds to the year-round interest of the 10 foot high by 8 foot wide tree.

Pink Dawn chitalpa (*Chitalpa tashkentensis* 'Pink Dawn'; Zones 6–9) doesn't get any bigger than 15 feet tall despite its parentage, is drought tolerant and sports pink foxglove-like flowers in summer that persist. "It's a well-behaved tree in the landscape," Steffen said.

Harlequin glorybower (*Clerodendrum trichotomum* 'Fargesii'; Zones 6–9) is a personal favorite plant of Cody Hahnen, sales manager at Youngblood Nursery (Salem, Oregon). He has one in his front yard. It's a small tree with large dark green peanut butter-scented leaves, which features pink-to-red flowers in late summer that smell like fruit loops, followed by



a metallic blue fruit in the fall. Maturing at up to 16 feet tall, it does well even with no direct sunlight.

Golden Shadows® pagoda dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia* 'W. Stackman'; Zones 3–8) makes up for a less dramatic floral showing than other dogwoods by providing spectacular variegated foliage. In early spring, bright fresh green foliage emerges with a chartreuse edge. The leaves mature to a bright golden yellow with a deep green interior. An excellent small tree that reaches about 15 feet high by 8 feet wide, Steffen thinks that it radiates elegance with layered branching.

Scarlet Fire® dogwood (*Cornus kousa* 'Rutpink' PP28311; Zones 5–9) is the first release in 45 years from the Rutgers University breeding program.

"The flower is just spectacular, deep pink to fuchsia," Dittmar said. "This tree is bred to be sturdy and disease resistant and beautiful."

A 20 foot high by 15 foot wide tree,

Jade Butterfly maidenhair tree.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA

the leaves emerge streaked with purple. In summer come the flowers, followed by purple-pink fruits — about an inch in diameter — that attract birds. In fall, the leaves turn reddish-purple.

Jade Butterfly maidenhair tree (*Ginkgo biloba* 'Jade Butterflies'; Zones 4–9, pictured) is a tall and narrow tree dwarf version of the species, reaching 10 feet by 8 feet over a long period. The foliage shape

is the typical *Ginkgo*, but not the color. Starting out with a hint of green and a bluish hue to the leaves, their color turns to the classic bright yellow color in fall when they hang on very late. According to Dittmar, it has a nice vase shape and tall stature, and when the wind blows, the leaves flutter like a butterfly's wings.

Magnolia 'Genie' (*Magnolia soulangeana* × *lilliflora* 'Genie' PP20748; Zones 5–9) is a relatively new cultivar. The tree has large, blackish buds and deep purple-red fragrant flowers on a compact upright grower with a rounded leaf.

"I started to see it this year in the landscape, and it has a tight upright oval shape, fairly compact, with an ultimate height of 12 to 13 feet," Steffen said.

Conifers

Starker's dwarf Korean fir (*Abies koreana* 'Starker's Dwarf'; Zones 4–8) develops a broad, columnar shape with upright pinkish cone clusters that come in even at the 5 gallon size. According to David Grotz, owner of Peace of Mind Nursery (Silverton, Oregon), it's slow growing. The tree only adds about 3 inches a year, and the biggest one Grotz has sold so far was 10 feet tall.

Silver Show Korean fir (*A. koreana* 'Silver Show'; Zone 5, pictured) is the next generation of *A. koreana* 'Silberlocke', but is more robust, grows wider and gets huge clusters of 2-to 3-inch dark purple cones — so many, that the branches get heavy and appear to weep. The flat needles of the genus curl up, revealing a white underside, which Grotz considers an attrac-

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tion in the garden. It enjoys full sun and matures at 12 feet high by 7 feet wide.

Grotz loves them all, including ‘Silberlocke,’ but he doesn’t want to leave out **Nanaimo Korean fir** (*A. koreana* ‘Nanaimo’; Zones 5–7). It is a fabulous dwarf columnar with narrow purple cones that appear at a young age. Taking up a narrow footprint, the tree matures after about 15 years to about 6 feet high by 4 feet wide.

Subalpine fir (*Abies lasiocarpa* ‘Glauca Compacta’; Zones 4–8) is a very bright blue North American fir tree. Sam Pratt, sales manager at Rare Tree Nursery (Silverton, Oregon) believes it’s bluer than most of the **Colorado blue spruce** (*Picea pungens* ‘Glauca’), with the added bonus of having less blight problems. With a young globe shape that soon forms into a pyramid, it matures over a 10-year period



Silver Show Korean fir.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA

to about 4 feet high by 2 feet wide.

Blue Surprise Port Orford cedar (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* ‘Blue Surprise’; Zones 6–9) is grafted to Guardian® rootstock and was developed by Oregon State University to resist *Phytophthora lateralis*. Pratt believes its vitality is a reason why we should invite people to put this cedar back in their gardens. ‘Blue Surprise’ has soft and feathery, powder blue foliage that is juvenile, and grows up into a spiral of 5–6 feet tall by “scarcely” 2 feet wide over 10 years. It’s blue in the growing season and then gets a plum-colored cast in the winter.

Golden Hinoki cypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa* ‘Crippsii’; Zones 5–8) is broadly pyramidal growth, reaching 8–12 feet wide by 4–6 feet tall, with feathery leaves that are bright green (almost chartreuse), that turn more



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Hinoki cypress 'Verdoni'

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golden yellow with char-
treuse tips as they get older.
In Hahnlen's experience, it
is drought-tolerant in sun to
part-shade, and will tolerate
total-shade.

Chamaecyparis obtusa
'Rainbow' (Zones 4–8) gets its
name from the summer hints
of red and orange. Otherwise,
the extremely slow-growing
dwarf with dense lemon-gold
growth is slightly streaked
with green. It reaches approximately 4
feet wide by 3 feet tall, "It's one of those
shade plants that should be used more,"
Hahnlen said. It needs only a little bit of
sun to get red and orange, but full sun
will burn it.

Hinoki cypress 'Verdoni'
(*Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Verdoni'; Zones



4–8, pictured) is one of Grotz's favorites,
with its slow-growing, dense foliage and
beautiful blend of gold and green. An
upright columnar, it matures at 8 feet tall
by 6 feet wide in 25 years. Grotz considers
the best feature to be that it will not turn
brown in intense sun.

White-tip dwarf Japanese cedar

(*Cryptomeria japonica*
'Knaptonensis'; Zones 5–9) is a
dwarf evergreen shrub with old
growth that changes to a darker
green for a beautiful contrast to
the glowing white/cream juvenile
foliage. Conical in habit and a
very slow grower to 5 feet tall by
3 feet wide, it takes pruning well.
According to Hahnlen, it will
brighten up those dark spots as it
pushes out its new growth, which
turn brown with too much sun.

Unlike *Picea glauca* 'Conica', which
tends to revert to a full-size tree, *P. glauca*
var. *albertiana* 'J.W. Daisy's White'
Alberta spruce (Zones 3–8) stays dwarf.
"The color changes are spectacular," Pratt
said. Creamy white new growth creates an
attractive focal point on a tree that grows
only 2–4 inches per year, maturing at

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about 3 feet tall.

Serbian spruce dwarf (*P. omorika* 'Peve Tijn'; Zones 3–8) has needles with a blue underside, but tips that are gold. Pratt notes the gold is especially noticeable when sun-kissed. It takes 10 years to reach 2 feet tall by 1½ feet wide, works well in containers. It starts globe-shaped but then matures pyramidal.

***Picea pungens* 'Ruby Teardrops'** is a new dwarf variety. Maturing at about 3 feet tall, the powder blue foliage contrasts with the bright red cones covering the tips starting in April — matched in color by tulips, according to Pratt — that persist through July when they turn brown. Annual growth rate is 2–4 inches, and it matures at about 3 feet



Acrocona Norway spruce.
PHOTO COURTESY OF PEACE OF MIND NURSERY

but stay on the 12-foot-high-by-8-foot-wide tree all year.

Pratt recommends *Pinus sylvestris* 'Moseri' to those interested in the golden color of *P. contorta* var. *latifolia* 'Chief Joseph' because it is much easier to grow. It turns bright gold in winter, is a more natural dwarf and isn't prone to sunburn. Maturing over 10 years, it develops into a squat pyramid topping 4–5 feet.

wide by 3 feet tall.

Acrocona Norway spruce (*Picea abies* 'Acrocona'; Zones 3–7, pictured) is a teardrop form of dwarf spruce that gets showy immature raspberry-colored cones at the ends of its lateral branches in April. After staying a minimum of 10 weeks the cones change to green and then brown,

Wiethorst hybrid pine (*Pinus × schwerinii* 'Wiethorst'; Zones 4–7) is a slower-growing variety — 4 feet tall by 3 feet wide over 10 years — of *P. flexilis* 'Vanderwolf's Pyramid' with the long soft needles of its Himalayan parent and the hardiness of its Eastern white pine parent. Pratt thinks it is special because of the ➤



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Small spaces

proliferation of 7-inch-long pendant cones that decorate the wind-swept pyramidal shape.

Dwarf Eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus* 'Mini Twists'; Zones 3-8) is a 6 foot tall by 4 foot high tree after 10 years, and charms with its twisted and curved needles and blue-green color on a rounded globe-shaped form. Pratt compares the growth habit to *P. strobus* 'Blue Shag', but the curly needles and slow growth make it a better choice.

Adcock's Dwarf Japanese white pine (*Pinus parviflora* 'Adcock's Dwarf'; Zones 4-7) is an extremely dwarf upright pine with small needles on short stems. The needles do drop each year, but Grotz thinks they are not a problem. Drought-tolerant, it is a good plant for container growing, reaching only 5 feet wide by 5 feet tall in 30 years. The shape can be flat, round or eventually pyramidal with tightly packed and slightly twisted blue-green needles that fill out to the ground.

Kotobuki Japanese black pine (*Pinus thunbergii* 'Kotobuki'; Zones 5-8) will take 10 years to get to 4 feet tall, and 25 years before reaching 10 feet tall. Along the way is the reward of an easy-to-maintain columnar upright tree with a uniform habit, rich dark green foliage and white candles in spring.

Dittmar suspects that if you were walking through a garden and saw **Primo**[®] *arborvitae* (*Thuja occidentalis* 'IslPrim'; Zones 4-8), you'd think it was a Hinoki cypress. However, it's a *Thuja* and is hardier than Hinoki. It's durable, narrow upright form can be multileadered over time, but is mostly single leader. At 4 feet high by 1 foot wide, it fits narrow spots, offers a rich green color in summer and a possible bronzing in winter. It's good in containers and remains small with a natural, sculpted look as it ages.

Weepers

Divinely Blue deodar cedar (*Cedrus deodara* 'Divinely Blue'; Zones 6-10) is tough. Hahnlen states that it is deer-resistant and drought-tolerant. New growth is very light and bright blue-gray, and it has multiple leaders that weep. It can be trimmed for a prostrate or conical shape at 6 feet wide by 6

feet tall. Hahnlen suggests that it makes a natural centerpiece with darker colored mondo grass or purple fountain grass to pull out the colors — even in full-shade.

Pratt considers the best blue color of any Colorado blue spruce comes from ‘The Blues’ blue spruce (*Picea pungens* ‘The Blues’; Zones 2–8, pictured). It can be trained to be a large weeper.

Dittmar adds that ‘The Blues’ grows a central leader and the sides cascade from it like a blue waterfall. Otherwise, it is mound shape, and after 10 years it’s only 6–7 feet tall by 3 feet wide. It can be trained to fill a space in a container, upright, or even covering a fence or wall.

Fragrant Fountain Japanese Snowbell (*Styrax japonicus* ‘Fragrant Fountain’ PP



The Blues’ blue spruce.
PHOTO BY CURT KIPP

19664; Zones 5-8) weeps with densely cascading branches and keeps to a neat 6 feet tall by 5 feet wide with a central leader and no staking. A winner of the Farwest 2008 Best in Show award, the tree’s flowers are typical to *Styrax*, with masses of fragrant blooms in early spring to summer.

Thorsen’s Weeping western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla* ‘Thorsen’s Weeping’; Zone 5) is versatile. “You can make it do whatever you want,” said Dittmar. A true weeper, it can be staked up to weep down, or it can be made to spread over the garden. Dittmar has one at home staked at about 5 feet tall and less than 2 feet wide, with a skirt spreading to make a nice mat on the ground. It will

take sun to partial shade, and the foliage is durable, dense and green, without much view of the branches. ☺

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