

## Small landscape plants suited to today's gardens

As anyone can tell you, great things come in small packages.

Most gardeners and landscape designers are beginning to value some of the "small" landscape plants that are perfectly suited to today's more compact home gardens. Gone are the days when many Canadians had a "back forty" to let plants run riot on.

Today, LESS is MORE, so to speak. Slow growing, compact and/or dwarf conifers (evergreens) are more widely used than ever before. Dwarf evergreens add landscape interest for a variety of reasons, their eye-catching good looks; unusual colours, shapes and texture; year-long beauty (they don't drop their foliage like deciduous trees and shrubs); their relatively low maintenance requirements; and their terrific durability and hardiness.

Dwarf plants are accidents of nature which have been discovered and then reproduced mainly through taking cuttings of the mutant so that the odd characteristic is passed along to new plants.

Considering how expensive this process of reproduction is as compared to seeding, it's a wonder that dwarf conifers are as inexpensive as they are!

Dwarf trees are basically different from slow-growing and compact plants, but both are terrifically useful in today's gardens.

Whenever a plant is chosen from a small landscape garden, the gardener must always be mindful of the potential mature size of the plant. Compact can mean small, or it can mean dense, and relatively slow growing. Make sure you ask your landscape designer or nurseryman what the mature height and width of any given plant will be.

Another thing to keep in mind is that dwarf or small does not mean insignificant. Don't make the mistake of not giving these plants sufficient room to grow and show off their



### A GREENER THUMB

Mark Cullen

beauty. Give them reasonable space so that they are displayed to their best advantage.

Also, make sure that the spaces around them are filled in with low growing ground covers, annuals or perennials. You don't want tall flowering plants to outgrow the dwarfs and hide their considerable beauty.

Have a look in your local nursery's catalogue to see what varieties of dwarf evergreens are available. You never know what treasures you'll find.

Mark Cullen is a respected gardening columnist, T.V. and radio broadcaster, and the author of **A GREENER THUMB: The Complete Guide to Gardening in Canada. Watch for ANYTHING GROWS with Mark Cullen on CBC-TV. Check your local listings. Listen for THE GARDEN SHOW with Mark Cullen on CFRB 1010, Saturdays at 10 to noon.**

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## Fish-farming big in the '90s

Biologists at Dalhousie University in Halifax are developing new techniques that will allow fish farmers to grow bigger fish, faster. The research is part of a network of aquaculture genetics projects supported by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) throughout Asia.

One thrust has been to develop a procedure for estimating fishes' growth rate. Fish produce annual rings on their scales similar to those in tree trunks. Smaller rings are produced more frequently. The researchers are developing methods for using the spacing of the smaller rings to indicate how quickly the fish are growing.

### Global Perspectives

The researchers are also looking at ways of optimizing the fishes' growth rate, by grouping them by size to prevent large fish dominating the food supply. They've also been developing measurement techniques that will allow fish farmers to distinguish between a male and a female fish at

an early age. They could then be separated before they reach sexual maturity so their energy will go into growth rather than reproduction.

The Canadian research complements work underway in China, India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand

to develop fast-growing, disease-resistant fish for fish farmers. It promises to bring aquaculture to the level of technological development that has improved other domesticated animals like poultry and cattle in recent decades.

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