

# Outdoor Living

## New And Old Spruce Trees

Many homeowners often plant young spruce trees with little or no regard for how large the trees will be in just a few short decades. It doesn't matter whether it be one of the much sought-after blue spruce, or one of the lesser-known white, Norway or Siberian spruce. All of these (which are hardy in virtually all of Canada) will easily attain 12 to 25 metres (40 to 80 feet) in height, with a spread approaching 3 metres (10 feet).

The popularity and beauty of the blue spruce seems to cause inexperienced homeowners to plant the small trees in areas where their growth will be restricted after only a few years. The difference comes in that there is almost no way that the growth can be restricted, unless the homeowner is willing to undertake a severe clipping regimen on the new growth each and every year. Since the latter does not happen, the most common scenario is for the larger lower branches to be chopped off in order to regain access to a walkway, driveway, or the entrance to the house itself! This is where the trouble for the trees begins.

It is most important when planting not only spruce trees, but other large trees—whether evergreens such

as fir and pine or deciduous trees such as maples and oaks—that sufficient room be allowed for the trees to achieve their full growth. The Canadian Garden Council advises that an inquiry to your garden centre should bring a close estimate as to just what ultimate size the tree you have chosen may be expected to achieve in your area.

By the way, if you are presently considering planting a blue spruce tree, there are several types available. The most common is the Colorado blue spruce. These vary in colour considerably, and through the winter months, retain more of a green than blue colour. It is generally the most economical variety to purchase. The oldest of the "real blue" blue spruces is Koster. Its major drawback has been a tendency to have a crooked main stem that needs to be staked upright for the first few years.

The Koster spruce, though still very much available, has now been superseded by at least two other varieties you may want to check out at your favourite garden centres: Hoopsi blue spruce and Moerheim blue spruce. Both of these have a much better conical shape, straight main stem and excellent silver-blue needle colour throughout the entire year (although the colour is at its best in June).

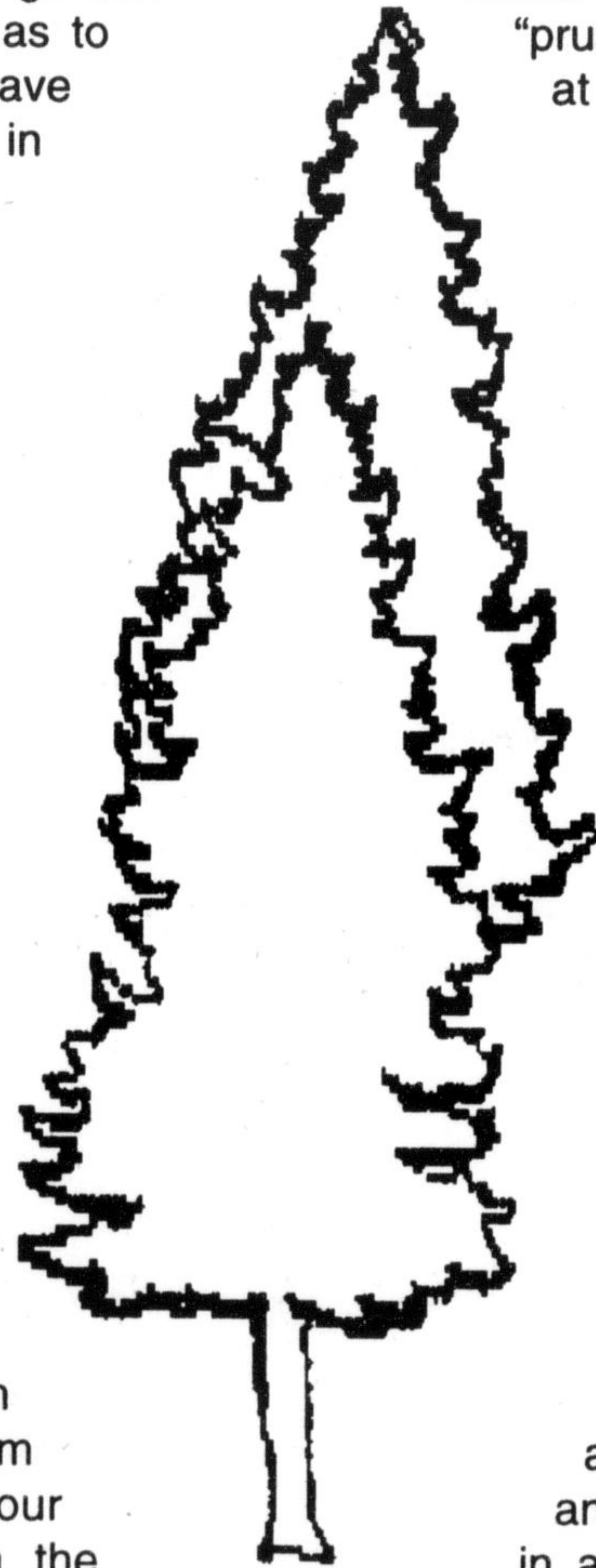
A common habit of homeowners, once a spruce achieves a large size, is to remove the lower branches. Often this is done to accommodate access around the

tree because it was planted too close to a walk or driveway. But sometimes it's done just because it's thought to be the "thing to do." Even many professional landscapers are guilty of this sin. If this "pruning up" sin can be avoided, it should be—at whatever the cost!

According to the Canadian Garden Council, one of the problems that affects older spruce trees is a canker disease known as cystospora. It occurs generally on older branches at the interior of the trees. One of the best methods of avoiding the disease is to keep older trees in a healthy state. An important way of doing this is to ensure that all of the lower branches remain on the tree, removing only dead or dying limbs. It is likewise important to leave all of the old needles, which annually fall from the tree, beneath the branches. This material acts as a natural mulch, both keeping the surface roots cool and moist and maintaining an acidic soil condition which the trees prefer.

The canker disease is most easily noted on the interior branches near the trunk where exudations of sap with a white, cottony appearance are evident. The only solution is the sterile removal of all dead branches exhibiting this appearance. After each cut, dip the saw or pruners in alcohol to prevent spreading the disease.

Some even recommend treating each cut on the tree with a sterilant such as wood alcohol. The removed branches should either be burned or disposed of as garbage—not composted.



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## Do Wildflowers Appeal To You?

Whenever anyone asks if there is such a thing as a maintenance-free flower garden, the answer would be yes—join the crowd and sow a wildflower patch or meadow. Wildflowers have the enviable attraction of offering both beauty and self-sufficiency. With wildflowers, the home gardener achieves that razzle-dazzle effect of colours and forms with the benefits of hardiness that are not often found in most of our domesticated garden flowers.

It's interesting to note that wildflowers prefer soils of low fertility, and many of them are drought tolerant. Imagine—all those colours, shapes and fragrances with no fertilizing, no trimming, less watering and mowing only once at the end of the season.

The best idea for the most effective, long-lasting wildflowers is achieved by planting a mixture of both annual and perennial species. The annuals come right along quickly, perform beautifully the first year and provide protection for the perennials that will flower the second year.

