

2001

Fir Trees - You Have a Friend

Dennis Hinkamp
Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_histall

 Part of the [Horticulture Commons](#)

Warning: The information in this series may be obsolete. It is presented here for historical purposes only. For the most up to date information please visit [The Utah State University Cooperative Extension Office](#)

Recommended Citation

Hinkamp, Dennis, "Fir Trees - You Have a Friend" (2001). *All Archived Publications*. Paper 895.
http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_histall/895

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Archived USU Extension Publications at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Archived Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact dylan.burns@usu.edu.





GARDEN NOTES

FIR TREES - YOU HAVE A FRIEND

By Dennis Hinkamp

March 2001

Spring-41

Of all the evergreen tree varieties in the landscape, firs are probably the least often planted. In northern Utah, the blue spruce reigns as the tree of choice.

“You can’t walk around a block without bumping your head into a stray spruce branch or two,” say Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. “Pines are not quite as popular. You might have to walk a whole two blocks before a strong Austrian or Scotch pine branch would reach out and conk you on the head.”

What about the graceful fir tree?

Of the three - fir, spruce and pine -- the fir may be the most people-friendly tree, Goodspeed says. A fir tree has soft needles, a graceful appearance, a strong root and anchorage system and they also have fewer problems than many spruce and pine trees.

“I would never suggest growing a large fir tree in a small landscape, but for those yards with more room, some fir trees are just the ticket,” he says. “More and more dwarf firs are being introduced now into the market. They are the perfect choice for a smaller lot.

“One of my favorite trees is the white fir. Probably the most adaptable fir, it tends to be a bit more forgiving. Some firs are quite picky about where they are grown, and in what type of soil. White firs can be grown in most soil types, although like most trees, they prefer it well-drained.”

White firs are somewhat drought resistant and have even been known to grow out of cracks in granite rock or in old gravel pits, Goodspeed says. In an area where only Mother Nature waters, a white fir usually can survive just fine. They get their name from their light-colored needles. New growth is a nice, light green to blue color, which is quite attractive. They can reach a height of 45 feet, with a spread of 25 feet. Like most firs, they have a pleasing pyramidal shape. The Fastigate variety has an upright, almost columnar form.

Another tall fir that grows in our area is the balsam fir, he adds. These firs are often grown to be sold as Christmas trees. The needles have that wonderful “forest” aroma. The balsam fir also has a very pyramidal shape, and can reach heights of more than 50 feet. It has a shallow root system and adapts to many growing conditions.

The dwarf balsam fir, is also wonderful dwarf form of this tree, Goodspeed says. Its slow growth keeps it less than four feet tall. It is a good replacement for a dwarf Alberta spruce or the bird nest spruce. The bottom sides of the needles have a silvery cast that accents its attractive form. This plant does best with at least a couple of hours of shade throughout the day.

“One of the most common evergreens in our mountains is the subalpine or Rocky Mountain fir,” Goodspeed says. “It is classified as a short-lived tree, if you consider 100 years short lived. I love its great upright, almost columnar shape. Growing to a height of 40 plus feet, it can be a good accent tree in many landscapes.”

The compact blue alpine fir, a dwarf variety, is sold in some nurseries, he says. It only grows about five to six feet tall, with a foot or two spread. Its nice, blue cast makes it very attractive in the winter when it is covered with freshly fallen snow.

There are a few other dwarf, and different-shaped fir varieties on the market in many of our nurseries and garden centers, Goodspeed says. Look beyond the spruce and pine trees to see what other choices are available for your landscape.

For more information, contact your local [USU County Extension office](#).

Utah State University Extension is an affirmative action/equal employment opportunity employer and educational organization. We offer our program to persons regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 9 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert L. Gilliland, Vice-President and Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. (EP/03/2001/DF)