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GARDEN NOTES

BUY THE DOG, NOT THE PUPPY WHEN SHOPPING FOR CONIFERS

By Dennis Hinkamp

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Colorado blue spruce are one of the most popular plants sold in nurseries. They are cute, colorful—like a little puppy who needs a home, It's even worse when they go on sale in the Fall. Why settle for just one, why not take two or three? Beware, you may be getting a Saint Bernard when you really wanted a Dachshund.

The problem with cute, little blue spruce trees is they grow up to be large and obnoxious reaching heights of more than 80 feet with a spread of 50 to 60 feet," says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. "This is the size of many front yards."

That said, large blue spruce are beautiful if they have room to grow. But, too often they are bought to fill a small landscape area. The first 5 or 10 years they look great, but soon out-grow their welcome, Goodspeed says.

He suggest considering a variety of dwarf conifer instead.

"Many of these trees only reach a mature height of between 3 and 15 feet. They fill an attractive niche in many landscapes, and will not encroach on the surrounding plants, sidewalks or airline flight paths."

For example, there are a couple varieties of blue spruce that only reach 10 to 15 feet. They are "Fat Albert" which has a pyramidal shape with a soft blue color and "Baby Blue Eyes" which is a deep blue color with a uniform growth that is more upright than Fat Albert, Goodspeed says.

"The 'dwarf Norway' spruce is even smaller. It has blue-green needles, and gets no more then 5 feet tall."

Or, consider firs, he says. The needles are soft and they lend a tranquil feel to the landscape. Dwarf balsam fir grow to only two feet. They are very slow growing and have a globular shape. Other dwarf firs include Klein's nest fir, compact Korean fir and the Picolo balsam fir.

Other options are Bristle cone pine trees. "They can reach 20 feet, but may take a couple hundred years to get there. Cecilia and Sherwood Compact varieties remain dwarf even after 200

years."

Other pines that remain relatively small include Tanyosho pine, dwarf Eastern white pine, dwarf Scotch pine and the Swiss mountain pine, he says.

For a more exotic look , Goodspeed suggests conifers that weep or have an unusual form. These include the dwarf globe blue spruce, which makes a nice patio scrub. Sergeant's weeping hemlock forms a 5 by 10 foot mound of grace and beauty. These do not do well in heavy soils, can be touchy, but are well worth the trouble.

"There are a couple of other attractive conifers that are hard to find and take a little extra care, but in my opinion are worth it," he says. "The weeping Norway spruce needs a light, organically rich soil, but is very attractive. Also, the weeping European larch is an unusual deciduous conifer. Its Autumn color is bright yellow, and the new growth each spring is a vivid green."

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