

Evergreens capture people's attention this time of year. Whether selecting a Christmas tree, gathering branches for a wreath, taking a walk or just looking out the window, their welcome green rises above the brown and gray of lawn and garden.

The difference in color, texture and structure of different conifers might not be obvious until trying to select the perfect Christmas tree, but variety there is. And variety is more essential in landscape plantings now than ever before.

The two most commonly planted pine trees of the last 50 years are Scotch pine and Austrian pine, both of which are being decimated by diseases and pests.

Throughout much of the Great Plains, just a handful of species make up the majority of evergreens being planted, making them extremely vulnerable to challenges brought on by insects, extremes of weather and diseases.

The more diverse a landscape is, the more likely it is to survive whatever challenges come along. Fortunately, there are some lesser-known evergreens that can offer welcome variety to private and public landscapes. Here are just a few to consider:

- **Bosnian Pine, *Pinus heldreichii*:** A graceful, dark green, more compact tree that is a nice substitute for Austrian pine or Scotch pine. 50 feet high by 30 feet wide.
- **Bristlecone Pine, *Pinus aristata*:** A small, slow growing, picturesque tree with bottlebrush like tufts of needles at branch tips. Best on well-drained soils of western Nebraska. Grows to 30 feet high by 20 feet wide.
- **Concolor Fir, *Abies concolor*:** Graceful, soft, silvery-blue foliage makes it a nice alternative to Colorado spruce. 70 feet high by 40 feet wide.

- Douglasfir, *Pseudotsuga menziesii*: Soft blue-green needles with attractive cones. 70 feet high by 30 feet wide.
- Limber Pine, *Pinus flexilis*: Native to western Great Plains where it makes a good, drought-tolerant, long-lived landscape tree on well-drained soils. 60 feet high by 40 feet wide.
- Pinyon Pine, *Pinus cembroides*: A slow growing, extremely drought-tolerant tree. Best suited to well-drained soils of western Nebraska where it will grow up to 25 feet high by 15 feet wide.
- Serbian Spruce, *Picea omorika*: Similar to Norway spruce with graceful, drooping branch tips and attractively streaked silver-green foliage. Grows to 60 feet high by 30 feet wide.
- When planting evergreens, remember that most species prefer well-drained soils and will struggle in heavily irrigated, turf-dominated yards.

Planting deciduous trees too close to existing structures can often be remediated by pruning but spacing problems are less easily fixed with conifers, so be particularly careful when planting them near sidewalks, intersections or picture windows where they may eventually outgrow the space.