

May 1, 2025

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Bob's News & Musings

The Backyard Nursery

The biggest problem for a conifer collector is finding new additions to the collection. There are not a lot of sources in this country. Nurseries specializing in rare conifers are few and far between, and shipping costs are considerable. Purchasing conifers from these nurseries entails a substantial investment and easily limits the number of conifers a person can add to a collection each year. The expense can also put considerable strain on a marriage.

A nursery specializing in rare conifers makes a considerable investment in each plant offered for sale. Propagation (with losses) is the first expense. Plants that are rare due to low success rates in propagation are naturally expensive to produce, especially if grafted. Then, the plant is grown for two to five years before the sale, which adds considerable cost for materials and labor due to one or more uppottings into larger containers, periodic fertilization, weed-

ing, watering, property taxes, etc.

The few larger nurseries that offer rare conifers have all of this overhead on a large scale. Conifer Kingdom (Oregon), Western Evergreen Nursery (Oregon), and Gee Farms (Michigan) are three retail nurseries (also have wholesale divisions) that come to mind. Iseli Nursery is the giant in this category but is strictly wholesale.

Smaller nurseries are scattered across the country, and I am only familiar with a few. Low overhead usually relates to lower prices (until shipping kicks in.) Three of these (soon to be two are Bill Barger (Ohio), Crowfoot Nursery (Oregon), and Appeldoorn Nursery (North Carolina) (closing due to Bruce's retirement). There are others, but the ones I knew are no longer in business.



The Backyard Nursery (cont.)

A real conifer collector who does not have a few thousand dollars of disposable income yearly must develop a few skills to create an extensive collection 'on the cheap.' That statement is the focus of this article.

I achieved a world-class collection of over a thousand conifer cultivars in the 1970s on a school teacher's salary. I was able to achieve my goal for several reasons. First, there was an assortment of backyard nurseries in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Long Island, New York, where I could purchase plants cheaply. Second, there were three wholesale nurseries with a wide selection of rare conifers where I could buy plants when I got my Pennsylvania Nursery License. Third, I developed close relationships with several arboretums in the Northeast, where several skills I learned proved invaluable. Fourth, my wife, Dianne, became supportive and just chuckled at me whenever I spent all my money on plants because she knew I planned on using these plants as stock plants when I started my nursery.

When I began my journey into the fascinating world of conifers, I was willing to devote much of my time and energy to putting together a nice collection on my property. I wanted to be able to enjoy these interesting plants. Money-wise, however, I was at a disadvantage. I needed a source of income to finance this hobby. Too often, I traveled to Long Island and came home with empty pockets. I would spend my last fifty cents on the toll bridge over the Delaware River. But I always had my 1976 Datsun B-210 hatchback filled with plants.



Don Smith, Ed Rezek, Joe Reis, Joe Burke, Joel Spingarn, and Hank Weissenberger were all conifer collectors with small nurseries in their backyards. Less often, I visited Vermeulen Nursery and Verkade's Nursery to purchase plants at wholesale prices. The plant prices were low but still stretched my financial resources.

I quickly realized that I had to develop a few particular skills. First, I wanted a source of income from my hobby that I could use to cover my expenses. Second, I saw conifers in the gardens I wanted for my collection, but they were unavailable for various reasons. Third, all my collector friends had very special conifers that they could, or would, not share. Fourth, none of my plant sources propagated to order. I had to pick from whatever they had in their sales areas.

The skills I had to develop were horticultural and business-focused. Horticulturally, I needed to learn how to graft and root conifers. I also needed to know about growing healthy conifers in containers. For the financial aspects of my plans, I had to learn the best methods for packing and shipping conifers since my local customer base was next to nil. Maintaining good customer relations and avoiding deadbeat customers who do not want to pay for plants was a difficult learning curve, but Dianne took that on for me.

I cannot emphasize enough how important it is for a conifer collector to develop propagation skills. I lived close to one of the top conifer collectors in the country. Layne Ziegenfuss allowed me to visit and sit with him on Saturdays during the grafting season. Eventually, he taught me how to graft conifers. I was ready to rapidly expand my collection at a minimal cost when I developed that skill.

I had an excellent relationship with the Arnold Arboretum and the United States National Arboretum. I was allowed to take cuttings from any plants in their collections. Additionally, my conifer friends shared cuttings from their collections, and I soon reached the point where

The Backyard Nursery (cont.)

I had trading material for prying some of their extra special plants away from them.

Propagation skills are important for a collector for other reasons as well.

Early in my hobby, I was able to purchase a *Picea abies* 'Wagneri.' At the time, it was scarce and one of the tightest buns I had seen. I added it to one of my Leighton gardens, and two days later, a rabbit bit it off at the ground level. I could not replace it. If I could propagate my conifer purchases, I would have backup plants to cover losses.

If I was going to propagate plants from my collection as backups, I might as well do extras and sell them to other collectors. That way, I could cheaply expand my collection, make rare plants more readily available, protect my collection, and earn extra money to finance my hobby.

I started a retail conifer nursery in my backyard of about ½ acre. I never devoted more than one acre to the nursery (excluding stock plants since they were my landscape) in the 39 years that Coenosium Gardens was in business.

I will go through the steps I followed in creating my nursery. It will serve as a guide for anyone wanting to try the same thing.



Hobby vs. Business

I had a conifer collecting hobby. I decided to make it a business for extra income to finance itself. This article is about setting up a backyard nursery for income. I could have kept it as a hobby and done some things differently.

The IRS determines that a hobby can become a business when it shows a profit for three out of five consecutive years. The IRS also looks at the money involved in the income stream. The big difference for the owner is the ability to deduct expenses from a tax return.

The size and scale of the operation would determine which way to go. There are advantages and disadvantages to the hobby track and the business track. I chose the business track, while most collectors I knew kept to a hobby approach.

State laws vary, so a nursery license or plant-selling permit might be required to sell plants as a hobby.

The following steps are required for a successful business.

A business would need a sales tax number and must collect sales tax. The advantage of a tax number is that the business does not pay sales tax on anything being resold.

A business needs good record-keeping and copies of all plant sales.

A business needs a way to handle credit cards. I use a company called Square.

A business has to advertise. Ads in journals and other printed materials never led to sales for Coenosium Gardens. Word spread among collectors, and a printed catalog with pictures grew my business. In the 1990s, I taught myself to make a website. It was informative and developed a following. I published my catalog through my website. I could use color photos, and my catalog cost was zero dollars.

Name

Coming up with the name of a nursery can be tricky. If someone else is already using the name selected, legal problems could ensue. A search on Google can help, but it is not necessarily 100% accurate. Registering the name through the

The Backyard Nursery (cont.)

state is the best protection, and costs vary.

I took a different approach. I picked a name that nobody in their right mind would use: **Coenosium Gardens**. Only a small percentage of the population could pronounce, let alone spell, that name, which was what I was looking for. A Coenosium was a plant community. The name would be associated with quality plants and me whenever used.

I had to teach many people how to pronounce the name and what it meant. That little effort assured me the name would stick with them and be associated with me.

After deciding upon a name, I registered for a nursery license. The fee covered regular nursery inspections. These inspections are a part of doing business. If there are any plant issues, the inspector will recommend ways of correcting the problems. They are not there to put the nursery out of business. They also provide proof of inspection stickers that allow shipping plants through the mail.

Product

Lehighton, Pennsylvania, was not in the middle of a major plant market. I had to decide what sales I would do- in person or mail order. I had already determined the product. I would do rare and unusual conifers. Due to limited space, I would only offer sizes up to one gallon. Larger containers would need too much space. I would have at least three years before I would have to worry about a one-gallon inventory that was getting overgrown.

I knew that overproduction would cause space problems in the future. Ideally, everything would sell before plants started becoming pot-bound. Of course, such forecasting is an impossibility. No matter how carefully I tried to predict sales two or three years into the future, it was a hit-or-miss sort of thing.

I planned to ship two different product sizes. We

shipped established plants via USPS priority mail during April and May. We shipped the new grafts, which were special order, during June. The new grafts, not done for customers, were potted into one-gallon containers and sold after two growing seasons.

Plants ordered for fall shipment were pulled and set aside throughout the summer.

When a gallon plant became pot-bound, I determined if it was worth keeping for my collection. If it was, I up-potted it. If it was not, I recycled it.

Propagation

My propagation facility was a greenhouse built out of 2x4s and poly. I heated it with an old hot water coal stove and an LPG hot air heater in a wall of the head house. I could do up to about a thousand grafts and the same number of rooted cuttings.



Since I was selling at retail prices, I could tolerate some losses among the new grafts and cuttings. When I emptied the greenhouse in late May, I picked the best-looking grafts to fill orders. I set the rest aside for planting in one-gallon containers. I had a potting area in one corner of our property close to our can yard. As I potted, if a graft looked weak, I trashed it. The newly potted ones went to the can yard to be held until sold.

The can yard had two special areas. One was for plants I had sold, and the other was plants I kept for my collection.

The Backyard Nursery (cont.)

Propagation by grafting involves considerably more expenses than rooting cuttings. I preferred buying bare-root seedlings for understock in the spring and planting them in small pots. It was cheaper than buying potted seedlings. However, I would go with potted understock if I did a few hundred grafts or less. My price difference for my last year in business was \$.35 (\$.50 with the pot and soil) vs. \$1.50 for potted seedlings.

When I started my business, the grafters I knew used the small rose pots (2 1/2"). The roots were crammed into these pots. Layne used styrofoam cups. They provided more root space.

I had been to the West Coast and saw pots about 6 inches tall by 2 7/8 inches square with open slots in the bottom. Plants developed lots of roots, and they did not circle. They were called Anderson tree bands. I purchased several cases and had Anderson ship to me via UPS. I always used them for my grafting understock.



A conifer collector who can graft can expand a collection with rare plants at a low cost and make a little money from the extras. The facilities can be varied and range from a clear plastic trash bag on the north side of a house to an unheated polyhouse to a heated greenhouse or shop lights in a cool basement or garage.

There are several ways to learn grafting. I have a DVD that runs for two hours (\$20). I have sold over 1000 copies since 1990. Find a grafter who will let you sit and watch. Look for a class like Nancy Vermeulen's class in New Jersey. Check YouTube, but be careful as

some are not high quality and make mistakes. Whatever works for you.

Supplies

I quickly learned that I needed to deal with wholesalers for my supplies. I had a nursery license from Pennsylvania, which was the key to dealing with some of them.

While in Pennsylvania, I used peat moss, perlite, sand, and Osmocote fertilizer for my potting soil. I used a cement mixer to make my soil. I purchased round nursery containers for my one-gallon potting. I tried blow-mold containers, but they were too flimsy. Eventually, I switched to a 6-inch square pot for growing. The shipping weight was much less than that of a one-gallon, and the quality was equivalent.

In the Northwest, I had to change to a mix with better drainage properties. I used fine to medium bark, pumice, and mushroom compost with Osmocote. Mild winters with persistent rainfall led to root rot unless the potting soil was fast-draining.

When I did my potting in either region, I always finished by the end of September. I wanted the plants to have time for fall root growth before winter. If the roots did not grow into the new media, it would be soggy throughout the winter and drown the plant.

I preferred a German grafting knife. It held a sharp edge longer than any other knife.



Today, they sell for over a hundred dollars. An Exacto blade

will do the job for a small operation, but I like the feel of a good, quality grafting knife in my hand. I still use my oldest ones from time to time. I bought them in 1994. One has a broad blade, while the other has a thin blade. The thin blade works great for grafting toothpick-sized scions.

I like Felco pruners, and I have several different ones. They are expensive but easy to sharpen and have replaceable blades and springs. More importantly, they are bypass pruners. Anvil pruners crush cambium and are terrible for cutting scion wood. I have Bonsai pruners



The Backyard Nursery (cont.)

(fancy scissors) for cutting smaller scions.

I had to purchase white poly for winter protection, especially in the Northeast. It prevented temperature fluctuations, which could damage plant roots. Clear poly would heat up on a sunny winter day. That could kill plants. Root hardy plants I left outside my polyhouse. All of my *Picea* could sit out for the winter. So could the *Pinus strobus* and *Pinus sylvestris*. Everything else went into the polyhouse.



My first poly houses (above) were covered shade structures. My first heavy rain was almost a disaster when the water formed ponds on top of the houses and the poly stretched down to rest on the plants. I quickly made changes.

A framework of 2x6 lumber and 3/4" PVC pipe creating the hoop works nicely for a poly holding house. A section of pipe also must run the length of the house to make the bows rigid.

Sales and Shipping

When I started the business, I had to determine my product line. Would I sell from the available plants in my inventory, or would I do custom grafting? In the early years, I did both of these things. I listed everything I could graft to order and identified the ones in one-gallon containers as another option with higher prices. As time passed, I stopped selling fresh grafts. Not everybody

knew how to handle them, and losses occurred.



I had to decide on shipping plants in or out of containers. I removed them from their containers our first year and bagged the root ball for easier packing and lower shipping costs. That did not go very well. Several of our customers had problems and lost some of their plants. After one year, we decided to ship in the containers. Losses became almost nil.

Garden centers like to clean out old inventory with end-of-the-season sales. I decided I would never do that. It conditions customers to "wait for the sale" and is costly to the nursery. I only made such a sale when I retired and sold my inventory in 2013.

In Summary

Hopefully, this guide will encourage some readers to become involved in conifer propagation and sharing, trading, or selling their plants. It brings a whole new level of enjoyment to the hobby.



Coenosium Gardens in Lehighton Pennsylvania (1979-1986)



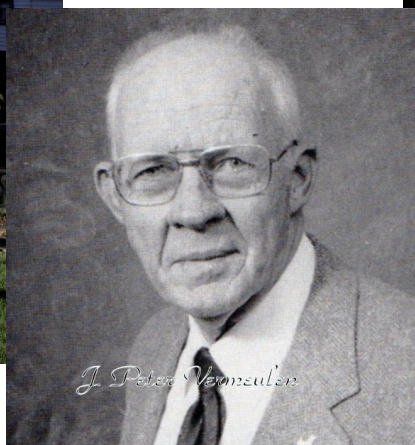
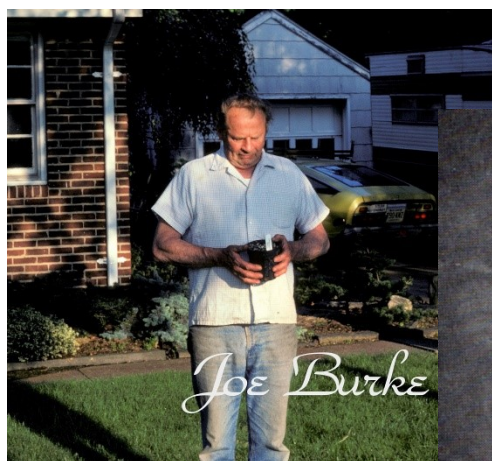
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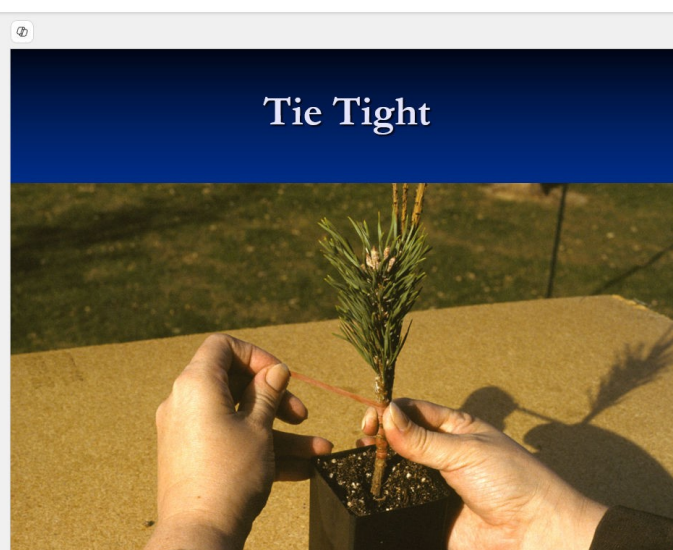
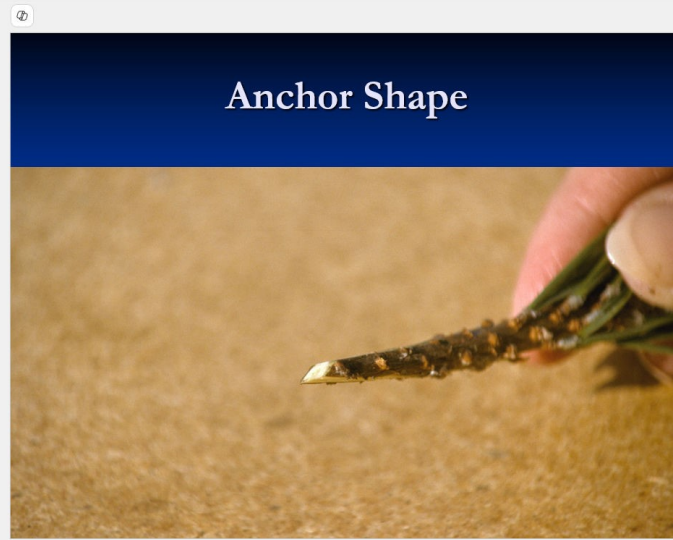
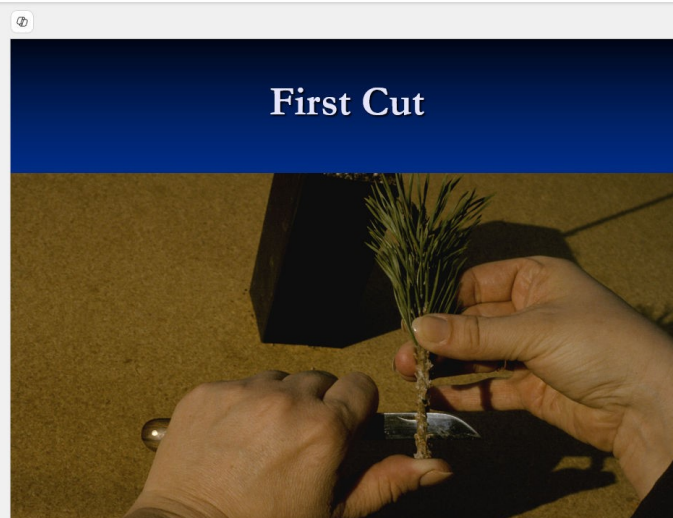
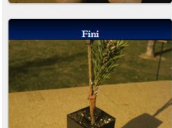
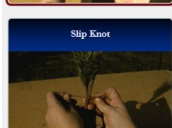
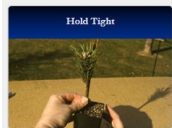
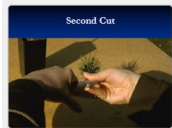
Coenosium Gardens in Wahington



My Early Conifer Sources: Plants and/or Scions



Grafting Method (from a powerpoint)



Conifer of the Month: *Abies nordmanniana* 'Golden Spreader'

In the late 1970's I was visiting the Hillier Arboretum to see the dwarf conifer collection when I came across a dense, broadly conical shrub with bright gold foliage. I found a label that indicated the plant was *Abies nordmanniana* 'Golden Spreader', a plant I had never seen before.

I was concerned about the possibility of sunscald due to some plants I had seen at the National Dwarf Conifer Collection in Windsor Great Park, Windsor, England. There was a grouping of three young plants growing in the full sun that had been badly burned. In my own garden I would occasionally notice burn in the early spring, but it was always quickly covered up by the new season's growth. As my plants became established, any sign of sunscald became a rarity.

Abies nordmanniana 'Golden Spreader' is a dwarf, dense, broadly conical plant that grows about 3" (6 cm) per year. Its foliage is yellow-green in the spring, becoming bright golden yellow through the summer. It is susceptible to sun scald in

full exposure in young plants. I had several in partial shade that turn bright yellow in the winter in spite of the lower light levels. Full shade, however, reduces the color's intensity.

Abies nordmanniana 'Golden Spreader' originated as a seedling about 1961 in the nursery of S. N. Shoots, Culemborg, near Boskop, Holland. Although young plants are spreading in habit, each one will eventually develop a slow growing terminal shoot and develop the shape of an old fashioned honey bee hive.

Its color and shape make it very desirable for any garden that can use a plant which may be 6' (2 m) tall and 8' (2.6 m) wide in twenty years. It can be utilized as a minispecimen in smaller sized landscapes or as part of a border garden among perennials as long as the perennials are not allowed to shade its lower branches.



Tree of the Month: *Quercus robur* 'Fastigiata'

I remember first seeing *Quercus robur* f. *fastigiata* at Hillside Gardens Nursery. It had been selected from a batch of seedlings. This selection tends to come true from seed and quite a few selections have been named. If it was a conifer, I would not consider 'Fastigiata' to be a cultivar name. It would be forma *fastigata* since various seedlings are providing the propagation material.

Variable in its fastigate growth habit, it is basically a narrowly columnar form with ascending branches. Some of the named selections can be dependable in their mature shapes.

It was originally described in 1785 in an English publication and the tree below is in the Hillier Arboretum in England. Fastigate seedlings have been selected with unique leaves (willow-like and cristate).



Bibliography: Feature Articles

December 2022	The Yaqui Renegade Part 1
January 2023	Problems with Gold Color in Conifers Layering of <i>Fagus sylvatica</i> 'Pendula'
February 2023	Why Conifers Weep
March 2023	Witches' Brooms
April 2023	Grafting Understocks for Conifers
May 2023	Winter Propagation of <i>Fagus</i> in Holland & U.S.
June 2023	Excerpt from: <u>Growing Up in the Switzerland of America</u>
July 2023	<i>Picea orientalis</i> 'Nutans' x 'Skylands' Hybridizing
August 2023	Grafting- Business or Pleasure Summer Grafting <i>Acer palmatum</i> Golden Witches' Brooms
September 2023	Dantsugi
October 2023	Dwarf Conifer Confusion
November 2023	Origins of Conifer Cultivars
December 2023	Why Are Some Conifers Gold?
January 2024	Landscaping With Dwarf/Miniature Conifers
February 2024	Weeping Hemlocks and Propagating Hemlocks
March 2024	What's in a Name?
April 2024	Naming Cultivars
May 2024	Coenosium Gardens Nursery and Its Firsts
June 2024	ACS Beginnings
July 2024	Vanilla
August 2024	"Sick" Conifers
September 2024	Drum Lacing Big Trees
October 2024	Pines for the Rock Garden Part One: Cushions
November 2024	Pines for the Rock Garden Part Two: Uprights
December 2024	Rock Garden Construction
January 2025	The Coming Year
February 2025	Firs for the Rock Garden
March 2025	Spruce for the Rock Garden Part One: <i>Picea abies</i>
April 2025	Spruce for the Rock Garden Part Two

Bibliography: Gardens and People**Gardens**

May-Sept 2023	Coenosium Rock Garden Part I thru Part 5
October 2023	Harper Collections
November 2023	Fran Mara
June 2024	Elandan Gardens
December 2024	Rock Gardens I have visited

Blast From the Past

July 2023	Jim Boyko
September 2023	Chub Harper
April 2024	Marvin Snyder
May 2024	Chub Harper
June 2024	Dick Bush
July 2024	Dennis Dodge
August 2024	Joe Stupka
September 2024	Al Fordham
October 2024	Jerry Morris
November 2024	Peter Vermeulen
December 2024	Gordon Bentham
January 2025	Elemer Barabits
February 2025	Derek Dibben & Piers Trehane
April 2025	Jiri Balatka

Bibliography: Conifer of the Month

2022

December *Picea abies* 'Gold Drift' & 'Gold Finch'

2023

January *Picea abies* 'Dandylion'

February *Pinus strobus* 'Sea Urchin'

March *Picea abies* 'Pusch'

April *Pinus densiflora* Dragon Eye forms

May *Pinus densiflora* 'Umbraculifera'

June *Picea orientalis* 'Skylands'

July *Sequoia giganteum* weeping forms

August Golden witches' brooms

September *Pseudotsuga menziesii* 'Graceful Grace' and 'Little Jon'

October *Picea abies* snake spruces

November *Pinus virginiana* 'Wate's Golden'

December *Pinus contorta* 'Taylor's Sunburst'

2024

January *Picea pungens* cone popping dwarfs

February *Picea pungens* 'R.H. Montgomery'

March *Pinus strobus* 'Stowe Pillar'

April *Picea pungens* spring white

May *Cedrus atlantica* 'Glauc Pendula'

June *Pinus sylvestris* 'Brentmoor Blonde'

July

August *Pseudotsuga menziesii* 'Graceful Grace'

September *Picea omorika* 'Buttermilk Falls'

October *Picea pungens* 'Copeland'

November *Calocedrus decurrens* 'Berrima Gold'

December *Cupressus glabra* 'Chaparrel'

2025

January *Cedrus atlantica* 'Fontaine'

February *Juniperus communis* ssp. *Conferta* 'Allgold'

March *Picea englemannii* 'Snake'

April *Microbiot decussata* 'Carnival'

Bibliography: Tree of the Month

2022

December *Fagus sylvatica* Dawyckii selections2023January *Fagus sylvatica* 'Ansorgei'February *Quercus robur* 'Furst Schwartzenburg'March *Acer palmatum* 'Red Filigree Lace'April *Fagus sylvatica* Rohani weeping formsMay *Fagus sylvatica* 'Ansorgei'June *Fagus sylvatica* purple weepersJuly *Acer rubrum* 'Candy Ice' and 'Vanity'August *Styrax japonicus* 'Frosted Emerald'September *Stewartia* 'Pink Satin'October *Fagus sylvatica* 'Cochleata'November *Fagus sylvatica* 'Purpurea Nana'December *Styrax japonicus* 'Evening Light'2024January *Fagus sylvatica* 'Aurea Pendula'February *Acer saccharum* 'Newton Sentry'March *Quercus robur* 'Facrist'April Pinus *Fagus sylvatica* contorted branchesMay *Fagus sylvatica* 'Interrupta Purpurea'June *Acer platanooides* 'Golden Globe'

July Vanilla Beans

August *Ginkgo biloba* 'Todd'September *Quercus robur* 'Concordia'October *Fagus sylvatica* 'Bicolor Sartini'November *Acer palmatum* 'Skeeter's Broom'December *Fagus sylvatica* 'Pendula'

2025

January *Pinus sylvestris* 'Purpurea Tricolor'February *Quercus robur* 'Salfast'March *Acer palmatum* 'Hana Matoi'April *Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Brilliantissimum'

Snow Woman: Rabies (August 1869) Part 1

It was a hot summer in the foothills of the Absaroka Mountains. A forest of pine trees with its green canopy and soft carpet of dried pine needles surrounded the Crow village, home to Snow Woman and her family. A nearby stream was running low but steady, with small fish hiding beneath fallen trees or among the rocks in pools scattered along its course.

Snow Woman sat in the shade of an old pine tree near one of the pools nursing her daughter, Laughing Waters. The young wolf, Night Walker, was off somewhere with Night Buffalo, her husband.

He wanted to work with the young wolf and see if it can be trained to become a dependable hunting companion. This past winter had been especially severe. A shortage of game in their traditional hunting areas meant several of the elderly tribal members left the village on cold winter nights to journey to the land of the Great Spirit. Scouting for new places farther into the forest and at higher elevations for new hunting grounds was critical. In the event of another hard winter, it would be time to move the village, a significant undertaking.

Snow Woman was daydreaming as she listened to the bubbling stream when she was startled by a sharp pain in her right nipple. Looking at Laughing Waters as she suckled, Snow Woman said, "As your small teeth appear, you become painful to feed. Soon you will be eating

other food."

Laughing Waters responded to her voice by yawning and stretching before releasing a loud belch, followed by a spell of giggling.

"You are a happy child," Snow Woman said as she held her up and looked her over. "Soon, I must put fresh milkweed to catch your waste."

Focused upon her child, she did not notice the approach of Small Bear, the village arrow maker. She became aware of his presence when he started yelling and swinging his arms as if attacking them where they sat. Snow Woman placed Laughing Waters to her side and pulled a razor-sharp knife from her belt.

She pointed the knife at Small Bear and stood between him and Laughing Waters. He ignored her and kept approaching, wildly flailing his arms and rapidly turning his head from side to side. Although she told him to stop and threatened him with her knife, he kept approaching in this strange manner. It was almost as if he neither heard nor saw her.

Before she had to use her knife, convulsions shook his body, and he fell to the ground. Thrashing about as he laid there, he kept making gurgling sounds. After a moment, he was still and stared at nothing as his body became very rigid.

Several warriors had seen the ruckus he was making and ran to help, arriving just as he fell to the ground. Gathering around and staring at him as he lay there, rigid as a fallen tree, these men talked among themselves and showed some signs of fear. They believed evil spirits

possessed him. Not wanting to risk the evil spirits entering their bodies as well, several of them shook their heads and stepped away from him.

Snow Woman watched their actions and shook her head. She had seen this sort of behavior before. It was shown by a man who had been bitten by a sick animal. Taking a closer look at Small Bear, she saw a poorly healed wound on his badly swollen left leg.

Holding Laughing Waters against her breast, Snow Woman chastised the warriors. "Why do you fear this sick man? These evil spirits can only enter your body through an animal bite. Cover his face and take him to the lodge of Gray Fox."

Two Crows was one of the men who had backed away. He was upset that a woman had said something about it. He was even more upset that it was Snow Woman. She had once thrown him out of her lodge when he had offered to take her as his wife.

"Bah, woman," he said. "Take your baby. Go and stay with the other women. This matter is for men."

Just then, Night Buffalo joined the group. He overheard Two Crows as he came near. Taking a position beside Snow Woman, he took Laughing Waters from her arms without saying a word. He did, however, have a wide grin on his face as he looked at Two Crows and shook his head.

Snow Woman immediately walked over to Two Crows and stood toe to toe with him. She was a tall woman, and he was an aver-

Snow Woman: Rabies (August 1869) Part 1 cont.

age size male, so they were eye to eye. As she stood there, she did not look down toward the ground as she spoke.

"Does Two Crows speak to me in that manner so to regain the manhood I took from him two years ago? Does he forget the many scalps that hang on the pole outside my lodge? I may be a woman, but I am also a warrior who has counted coup and fought against the enemies of our tribe. Does Two Crows challenge my place as a warrior in this village?"

Two Crows knew she was a dangerous person and, in no way, a typical woman. He also knew he would win no honor by challenging her. If he lost, the shame would be great. If he won, no one would think it any great accomplishment, and Night Buffalo would become his enemy.

It was a lousy situation for Two Crows, and he looked around, desperately trying to find a solution that would not involve losing face. He was about to say something as a retort when Chief White Owl arrived, taking charge of the situation.

Ignoring the confrontation taking place, he ordered four of the braves to carry Small Bear to Gray Fox's healing lodge. As the village medicine man, he would know how to drive the evil spirits from Small Bear.

Although this sort of attack by evil spirits was rare, it had happened several times in the history of the tribe. Usually, the victim died a painful death. Still,

occasionally the spirits were driven from the body, and a complete recovery ensued.

By now, a crowd had gathered and followed the group to Gray Fox's lodge. When they arrived, Gray Fox was waiting for them in front of his tepee. When they lay the moaning man upon the ground, Gray Fox spent a few minutes examining him, paying close attention to his swollen leg.

Gray Fox asked the crowd, "Did anyone see Small Bear get bitten by an animal?"

Slow Woman, Small Bear's wife, pushed through the crowd and knelt by his side. Before she could take his head and cradle it, she was pulled aside by Gray Fox, who said, "Small Bear possessed by evil spirits. He not know you. If he bites you, some of those evil spirits will enter your body as well."

As Gray Fox sat her on the ground a short distance away from Small Bear, Slow Woman wiped at a tear on her cheek and said, "On the night of the full moon, Small Bear went to harvest willow branches for his arrow shafts. It is then that the willows produce the finest wood. As he was cutting them, a skunk was hiding beneath one of the trees and bit him on the leg."

"Then what did Small Bear do?" Gray Fox asked.

"He kill the skunk with his knife and took the rest of the willows he needed," she replied.

"Skunk is powerful totem. Its spirit is angry at Small Bear and has placed evil spirits inside his body through the bite," Gray Fox told the crowd. Then he asked Slow Woman

another question. "What happen to Small Bear since full moon?"

"Small Bear come back to lodge, and I put moss on the wound. There was little blood, and next day he was fine and started making arrows. Willow branches were no good. Each would bend and could not be made straight. His leg started to bother him, and after several nights, it turned red and got large. He no can sleep. When we decide to come to Gray Fox, his leg get better. Today, it look very bad, and when I prepare breakfast, he run from lodge. He go into forest."

Gray Fox thought for a moment and went into his tepee. He came back out wearing a distinctive headdress and carrying two gourd rattles. The rattles held small, specially selected pebbles. He slowly walked around Small Bear while shaking the rattles and chanting a sacred song.

After several minutes of chanting, he told the crowd some of what had to be done to eject the evil spirits from Small Bear's body. Afterward, he went on a search through the village for some particular objects.

While Gray Fox was searching, a group of men laid out a pit. It was ten feet long and two feet deep. After digging it, they placed two large poles in the ground at each end. Each pair of poles had a crossbar. The women and boys gathered wood to fill the pit. Whenever they lit the fire, the flames would reach the height of the crossbars on the poles.

Stack 'em Deep/Teach 'em Cheap Excerpts

Naivete: Gullibility is a Student Trait

As a teacher, I always felt responsible for not taking advantage of my students. Most of them trust their teachers and need to be treated accordingly. They must never be exposed to the opinions or beliefs of the authority figure in their classroom. I always encouraged my students to make intelligent decisions based on rational thought and research.

The more implausible a story I told them, the more likely my students believed it was true. They often enjoyed being misled (tricked) from time to time as long as I did not make them look foolish. I first discovered students' naivete when I taught ninth-grade science at Tamaqua High.

We may have had different schedules when we taught at Tamaqua High School, but my wife, Dianne, and I often had the same students during the day. They loved to carry stories back and forth, and whenever something happened in one of my classes, she heard about it immediately.

Students often asked if Mrs. Fincham was my wife, especially the ninth-grade girls. I would invariably say no. She is my sister. That would make them pause for a moment. Then there would be some head nodding as if they understood. Usually, a few minutes later, they figured out that such a thing did not make sense, and then someone in class would set them straight. Kids are very naïve. Especially the ones that are trying to be "super cool."

Dianne was an English teacher who worked with all the grades at different times. Her room was next to the boys' lavatory. During lunch,

it could become distractingly noisy for her class. Once she went to the restroom door and threatened to enter if the noise did not stop. That calmed it down for some time. Another time, one of her students, Wayne, offered to leave class and quiet them down. It was interesting because that boy was a major disruptor in most other courses. However, he respected Dianne and valued his time in her class.

Once, Dianne was sick for a few days, and during that time, the annual farm fair was taking place in Harrisburg. Wayne was asking everyone where she was. He always wondered about Mrs. Fincham whenever she missed a day. She had arranged with the other English teachers to say that she had gone to the fair and entered the "tractor pull." Wayne was excited when she returned to school and asked how she did in the "tractor pull". However, he was disappointed when she said that she came in third. He realized that she had been pulling his leg weeks later.

When teaching life science to eighth-graders at Keithley Middle School, I inherited a monkey fetus in a jar of formalin. I would set it out on my desk early in the year. Then when students noticed it, I acted as if I had mistakenly left it out when I was supposed to keep it hidden. It was always possible to convince some of them that a preserved alien was in the jar.

I then pretended to divulge a far-fetched story about it. The alien had been shot by a farmer in western Washington when he spotted it walking in a field. The government hired me to keep and study it. I even had sixth-graders stop by my room after school asking me if they could look at "the alien in the jar" that a brother or sister had described.

The more implausible a story may be, the more likely some students will believe it. Most often, the trick is to be

sure they know the truth before the end of the class period. That way, everyone has a good time with the story, which can sometimes lead directly to a lesson.

I also had some fascinating conversations about dogs and cats. I was teaching a lesson about rabies to my eighth-grade science class when an opportunity presented itself. I pointed out that German shepherds are exceedingly challenging to train because they only understand German. English does not work. A Scottish terrier only understands Scottish and even a Siamese cat only understands Siamese. That is why they act so independently and do not listen to commands.

I stood by this ridiculous assertion until the next day. I heard later that I had stimulated some dinner table conversations in several students' homes.

During my tenure as an eighth-grade science teacher, I became known as the "teacher who eats chalk" by my students, some parents, and even a couple of school board members. As an old-fashioned teacher, I always had a chalkboard in my room. One day the kids were talkative during a lecture. I told them they made me so angry that I could "eat chalk." So, I proceeded to bite a stick of chalk in half, which I then chewed and swallowed. The kids were surprised and could not believe what I had done. Several of the more outgoing students wanted to try the chalk for themselves. I passed some out, and several joined me in a chalk snack. Unfortunately, the clay in the chalk coated the inside of their mouths. They decided they did not care for the taste and spit it out. Most of the students were too smart to try it. Those who did try it never repeated it. Chalk is not habit-forming.

I took pity on them on the ones who tried it and handed out Jolly Ranchers to help them get rid of the

Stack 'em Deep/Teach 'em Cheap Excerpts (cont.)

bad taste. That story spread throughout the campus and parts of the community. I have done this many times over the years. Eventually, I learned to slip a candy cigarette into the chalk box for my "chalk" snack. The kids always just got a small piece of chalk, followed by a Jolly Rancher.



Vulnerabilities: Innocence can Make a Fond Memory

While I taught at Eatonville High School, most students enjoyed my classes. Even those doing poorly did not want to switch to another teacher. Two years before I retired, several of my chemistry students with average grades told me they planned to take physics so that I could be their teacher again.

I taught many students for three years of their science education. They had earth science, chemistry, and physics with me, while other students who were not college-bound had me for two or more years in my fundamentals of biology class

(failed and then passed). One student had me for fundamentals of biology three years in a row. He failed it the first year, passed it the second year, and just wanted to retake my class for a third year.

When students repeated a class with me or returned on a visit after graduation, I sometimes heard things that made me feel good or produced a smile.

One day I wore black jeans and a black shirt with a bright pink/paisley tie. I received at least twenty different compliments from students throughout the day. One of my ninth-grade girls interrupted a class discussion to say that my tie affected her. After school, one of the junior girls in chemistry came in for extra help. Before leaving, she told me that she could not take her eyes off my tie while I was lecturing and quickly looked away every time I looked at her.

Kids think they are worldly, yet they often say the most innocent things. Although a person could interpret their statements inappropriately, I found students' sincere, guileless remarks to be one of the joys of teaching.

For instance, a ninth-grade girl at Tamaqua High School made an innocuous statement that might have made some teachers angry. I thought nothing of it, although I nicely corrected her with a smile. During a class about agriculture, I asked what farmers put on their fields to help the crops grow. She lived on a farm, so I called on her when she raised her hand (she seldom volunteered). She said "shit" with a wide grin. The students in the class either smiled or looked shocked. I told her she was correct but that we called it manure in class.

Near the end of my career, I rode in a parade. Eatonville High school's Daffodil Princess had selected me as her Educator of the Year. The Daffodil Festival involves all the schools in

Pierce County, Washington, and has been in place since 1933. The young lady who chose me had been my ninth-grade student three years previously and had taken my physics class as a junior.

It is incredible what stays in kids' memories. In my ninth-grade science class, she was diagnosed with leukemia in the first half of the school year. She had to leave school and do lessons at home throughout the first year of treatment. During her last day in science class, she asked me if she and a few of her friends could make friendship bracelets from some wooden beads I had in a plastic box on a shelf. (I would not let kids play with the beads because I used them for a classification lab in my biology class.) I allowed her and her friends to spend the class period making bracelets because I knew they would wear them and remember each other while she went through her treatments.

When she surprised me with my selection as Educator of the Year, she gave me a copy of what she wrote about me years earlier. It was the bracelet story. I like to think that what she and her friends did may have helped her through her ordeal. She was a beautiful Daffodil Princess who placed sixth out of twenty-two princesses for the position of Queen. Most importantly, her leukemia treatments had ended (she endured monthly chemo treatments while in my physics class). Now, she just receives regular checkups as she lives her everyday life.

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Most people don't know that back in 1912, Hellmann's Mayonnaise was manufactured in England. In fact, the Titanic was carrying 12,000 jars of the condiment scheduled for delivery in Vera Cruz, Mexico, which was to be the next port of call for the great ship after its stop in New York. This would have been the largest single shipment of mayonnaise ever delivered to Mexico.

But as we know, the great ship did not make it to New York. The ship hit an iceberg and sank. The people of Mexico, who were crazy about mayonnaise, and were eagerly awaiting its delivery, were disconsolate at the loss. Their anguish was so great, that they declared a National Day of Mourning.

The National Day of Mourning occurs each year on May 5 and is known, of course, as - Sinko De Mayo.

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