



# The wide world of weeping trees



Top: *Picea abies* 'Gold Drift' can be grown as a groundcover or staked into a small weeping tree.

Inset: A slow-growing, upright pendulous tree with rich butter-yellow leaves, *Fagus sylvatica* 'Aurea Pendula' grows to 6 feet tall by 2 feet wide in 10 years.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BUCHHOLZ & BUCHHOLZ NURSERY

## These elegant living sculptures occupy niches large and small in landscape design

**By Elizabeth Petersen**

Trees with weeping habits range in character and appeal.

Some afford graceful elegance, especially when combined with rocks or a water feature. Others are slender, vertical accents like exclamation marks.

Many are completely unique, distinctly individual living sculptures. Their arms of foliage reach out in random directions when they are staked up and their branches are allowed to flow.

Weeping trees can be functional too, providing a curtain of foliage to cover and hide unsightly forms. They can tickle the imagination with animated shapes that contribute surprise and fun.

No doubt, weeping trees have plenty to offer to the landscape scene.

So, why are they not used more often? Well, for all their elegance and character, weeping trees can be space hogs.

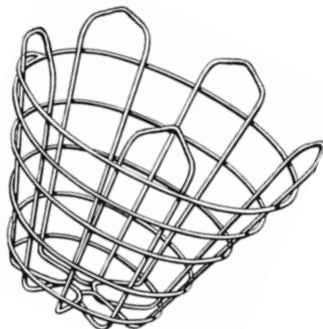
"I don't get many requests for weeping trees from clients," landscape designer Teresa Dennis said. "They take up more space than upright trees, and most urban properties can't accommodate them. It is rare to have a client with acreage and a pond, which would be an ideal site for a weeping tree."

Ron Johnston, who owns Windy Ridge Nursery in Troutdale, Ore. with his wife Sue, grows an assortment of weeping trees and sells them B&B to buyers nationwide. "Weeping trees take a lot of real estate in the field, and they are not typically bought in multiples," he said. "But I really like them because they are such unique characters as ▶



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## ▲ THE WIDE WORLD OF WEeping TREES



*Acer palmatum* 'Hana matoi' offers a fantastic color show. Spring foliage emerges purple with cream and pink variegation. As temperatures rise, the base color changes from purple to green, but the pink and cream variegation remains all summer. PHOTO BY [WWW.KARLGERCENS.COM](http://WWW.KARLGERCENS.COM)

stand-alone trees.”

The horticultural industry produces a diverse assortment of weeping trees, and new introductions make their use in smaller spaces more appropriate.

### New deciduous weeping trees

Talon Buchholz, owner of Buchholz & Buchholz Nursery in Gaston, Ore., targets a market niche that demands new, cutting-edge plants. He is always

looking for varieties with improved qualities that make them more marketable. “We don't try to compete with the massive producers,” Buchholz said.

Instead, the nursery offers plants that cannot be found elsewhere: high-quality trees for high-end, independent garden centers in almost every state and Canada, in sizes from #1 to huge specimens in boxes.

Buchholz shared his recommenda-



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tions for weeping trees, all of which are fairly new.

A new selection of Full Moon maple, *Acer shirasawanum* 'Kawaii', is an exciting introduction that Buchholz believes is the first and only plum-red shirasawanum laceleaf maple. Grown without staking by Buchholz, the tree develops a ground-covering form; staked, the tree produces a beautiful weeping form. Full sun generates the best color.

Buchholz likes *Acer japonicum* 'Abby's Weeping', which is slower growing and more refined than the widely sold 'Green Cascade'. It is less common in the trade and boasts fantastic fall color.

"New, neat and narrow" are words Buchholz uses to describe *Acer palmatum* 'Hana matoi', a red Japanese maple with white and pink variegation — "a most pleasing mix of colors." The tree maintains a more narrow stature than most weeping dissectums, and the nursery currently produces more of this cultivar than any other deciduous weepers.

"Some other growers have 'Hana matoi' but the trees might not have the best form or color," Buchholz cautioned. Since growers take cuttings from different parts of trees, the resulting trees are "not all created equal."

*Fagus sylvatica* 'Aurea Pendula' is a great tree that has been around for a long time, according to Buchholz, but it is hard to find in the trade. Sales for the slow-growing, upright beech with butter-yellow leaves are consistent at the nursery, though. "We sell out all the time," Buchholz said. "Few ornamental trees look more graceful in the spring garden."

An arching and spreading tree from Japan, *Stewartia monadelphpha* 'Pendula', has an attractive, weeping habit. Although not as easy to propagate as some selections, the original stock plants at the nursery have nice bark and hold their flowers at eye level.

Buchholz also likes the new, fountain-shaped weeping *Styrax japonicus* 'Marley's Pink Parasol' (formerly *S.* ▶



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*Picea pungens* 'Glauca Slenderina Pendula', a blue spruce introduced by Eshraghi Nursery, bows like an apparition. Very upright for a weeping selection, it still has weeping branches that form a skirt. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP





*japonicus* 'Momo shidare'). He predicted that it will become very popular for its narrow form and pink flowers.

**Endorsed by designers**

“When designing a planting plan, I try to use trees that have at least three seasons of interest,” landscape designer Teresa Dennis said.

Several weeping trees fit this bill, including the weeping crabapple *Malus* 'Louisa'. This selection has clear pink flowers, dark green foliage and loads of yellow fruit in the fall. It also has strong disease resistance, which is a must here in Oregon.

*Pyrus salicifolia* 'Pendula' (weeping willowleaf pear) is another favorite. Its willow-like silver foliage makes the tree useful as a specimen or focal point, especially against a dark green background. This tree is a good option only in the Pacific Northwest, where it won't be challenged by fireblight, as it is in the rest of the country.

For purple foliage, Dennis recommends *Fagus sylvatica* 'Purple Fountain'. Since it only spreads 12–15 feet and requires very little pruning, it is great for small gardens and perfect for homeowners who don't know how to prune or don't want to. Shiny purple leaves turn purple-red in fall and make quite a statement.

Dennis recommended *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* 'Morioka Weeping' for fantastic fall color. The new leaves emerge reddish purple before turning blue-green by summer and finally taking on shades of yellow, orange and peach in the fall “with a delicious smell of cotton candy,” Dennis said. “Yum!”

**Weeping conifers**

Deciduous trees notwithstanding, Dennis said her “favorites of the weeping world would definitely be conifers.” Weeping choices are available in different conifer colors for nearly every situation in sun or shade.

Among Dennis' favorites are a couple of deodar cedars.

*Cedrus deodara* 'Feelin' Blue' stays very low, only 2–4 feet tall with a ▶



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**Weeping White Spruce (*Picea glauca* 'Pendula')** has a strong central leader and slim pyramidal form. Growing to a height of 40–50 feet, its stately presence gives definition to driveways and walkways, and adds an exclamation point to lawn areas. PHOTO COURTESY OF BUCHHOLZ & BUCHHOLZ NURSERY

6-foot spread. Its size and shape make it perfect for a hillside or rock garden or as a focal point at the front of an herbaceous border.

Buchholz agreed that the small tree has outstanding color, and he prefers to stake it into an upright form to better display the weeping branches.

For golden yellow foliage, Dennis recommended Feelin' Sunny™ (*Cedrus deodara* 'MonKinn' PPAF.). Its foliage

does not burn — even in full sun.

Even the more familiar *Cedrus deodara* 'Pendula' makes a striking addition to the landscape, according to Johnston. The tree grows only as tall as it is staked, and then its silvery branches droop gracefully and develop into a wide skirt. 'Pendula' also produces striking, upright cones.

Blue Atlas cedar (*Cedrus atlantica*) has been around for a long time, and



for good reason.

"You see it used a lot on hillsides where it can cascade," Dennis said, "but I had a client who needed to hide her cyclone-fenced dog run. I found her cedars that were grafted at 3 feet high, attached the branches along the top of the fence, and now she looks at a blue curtain and not an ugly fence."

Dennis thinks that some of the most graceful weeping conifers are hemlocks including *Tsuga canadensis* 'Pendula' or 'Gracilis'. When staked and trained for height and character, *T. c.* 'Pendula' develops fully pendulous branches of foliage that cover the interior structure. "There is nothing more dramatic dripping down a hillside," Dennis said.

*Cedrus libani* 'Beacon Hill' is an attractive alternative to the weeping blue Atlas cedar, Johnston said. More upright and slow growing than *Cedrus libani* 'Pendula', 'Beacon Hill' has graceful branches that sweep toward the ground and flow out into a skirt. Compact, but dependent on staking for its ultimate height, the tree has light bluish green needles and many upright cones.

*Pinus sylvestris* 'Mitch's Weeping' is a big seller for Windy Ridge. "These trees have so much character," Johnston said. "Each one is unique."

Johnston likes to have customers make their own selections, depending on intended uses and the tastes of the property owner. Branches of the weeping Scotch pine flow to the ground from any height to which it is staked. Ultimately, the branches form a lovely skirt. Popular draping over rocks or a pond, 'Mitch's Weeping' boasts great silvery cones that provide an extra decorative element.

Dennis's favorite, by contrast, is a weeping spruce.

"My all-time favorite for something weeping, skinny, tall and graceful is *Picea glauca* 'Pendula'," she said. "It makes a perfect exclamation point in the garden. A mature specimen has the most beautiful, layered drooping ▶

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branches that hang all the way to the ground.”

Other weeping conifer recommendations from Buchholz include two selections of *Chamaecyparis nootkatensis* (syn. *Xanthocyparis nootkatensis*). ‘Green Arrow’ is an outstanding example of the Pacific Northwest native yellow cedar with extremely narrow growth. Side branches hang close to the trunk, so it is a great choice for smaller gardens and for growing in clusters.

‘Sparkling Arrow’, originally a mutation on ‘Green Arrow’ discovered by Buchholz, is an improvement over other variegated forms in that it doesn’t revert. “It hasn’t reverted yet,” Buchholz said. Best in mid-winter, the foliage shines and sparkles as the name suggests.

Weeping *Picea abies* ‘Gold Drift’ is a nice Norway spruce with subtle gold coloring that lends a soft, not harsh, look. Pendulous branches drape down from a staked height and develop a broad skirt. The ultimate size of ‘Gold Drift’ remains to be seen, Buchholz said, but the largest one he has seen, at Porterhowse Farms in Sandy, Ore., is about 5 feet tall and wide.

Gracefully weeping *Juniperus cedrus* (Canary Island Juniper) combines the look of a deodar cedar with unusual hardiness. Usually considered to be hardy only to USDA Zone 9, this strain has taken Oregon’s cold to about 7 F without damage. The tree stays fairly small but does well in a wide range of locales from B.C. to L.A.

Weeping trees may not appeal to everyone, but they bring together elements of unique character and grace to landscapes, offering many colors, textures and forms, and there are choices available to satisfy even the most discerning tastes. ☺

*Elizabeth Petersen writes for the garden industry and teaches SAT/ACT test prep at www.satpreppdx.com. She can be reached at gardenwrite@comcast.net or satpreppdx@comcast.net.*