

Gardens of the Northeast Region 2019 Meeting

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The ACS Northeast Region 2019 Meeting will take place next September 20-22 and will feature visits to three unique gardens in Connecticut's beautiful Farmington River Valley. Our group will board buses and travel through both suburban and rural settings on the way to the gardens. There will be local champion trees pointed out along the way! To whet your appetite, here is a description of each venue:

Although Chrissie and John D'Esopo bought their house in Avon, CT, thirty-four years ago, they discovered the joys of conifers only over the last seven to ten years. The three-acre property, of which 2 ½ acres are cultivated, was originally covered with mixed woodland. Upon contracting *Addicted Conifer Syndrome*, the couple found it necessary to clear away very large numbers of trees, resulting in a blank slate. One ancient *Acer saccharum* (sugar maple) remains next to the pristine 1780's residence, however. The flat, lower garden wraps around the house, driveway, and carriage house. Beyond this, the upper garden occupies a steep slope, crisscrossed with stepping stones and grassy paths.

At first glance, it is immediately evident that this Zone-6a garden is a labor of love. Chrissie's guiding light is the intersection of nature and art. She meticulously shapes and prunes many of the specimens; everything is in its proper place, and there isn't a weed to be seen. The lower part of the garden has rather fertile soil, while the rear slope contains clay. Chrissie neither amends the soil when planting, nor fertilizes. Either a plant is strong enough to make it (and most do), or else it is not worth growing.

The art of topiary is in full force here in the D'Esopo Garden. Examples include: spiral-form *Picea glauca* var. *albertiana* 'Conica' (dwarf Alberta spruce), cones

of *Thuja occidentalis* 'Jantar' (golden emerald arborvitae), multiple pom-pon *Pinus sylvestris* (Scots pine), a weeping *Larix decidua* 'Pendula' (weeping larch), trained into an Elephant, and a whole circular garden of octopi, sculpted from *Juniperus procumbens* on standards (Japanese garden juniper). Chrissie takes special pride and devotes countless hours into ensuring that these specimens look neat and crisp.

In pleasing contrast to the many sculpted and pyramidal conifers in this garden are weeping conifers, the greatest assortment of which are multiple cultivars of *Cupressus nootkatensis* (Alaska cypress). A monster-sized *C. n.* 'Glauc Pendula' dominates the lower garden, while a specimen of *C. n.* 'Sparkling Arrow' glistens on the slope. Elsewhere on the slope-garden, a wooden trellis/moongate (a great vantage point, from which to gaze at the wonders below) is flanked by twin *Picea omorika* 'Berliner's Weeper' (weeping cultivar of Serbian spruce). Several weeping cultivars of *Picea abies* (norway spruce) are peppered throughout the garden, and a rather tall, solitary *Picea glauca* 'Pendula' (weeping white spruce), stands like a sentinel in the lower garden.

Chrissie enjoys container-gardening, as well. Conifers in large tubs surround the house, and lush windowboxes grace the front gable-end of the house. During warmer parts of the year, many dozens of planters, full to overflowing with petunias and other vibrant annuals, expand the color palette of the garden beyond its coniferous range of blues, greens, and golds. Our September visit will find the entire garden in its colorful, sculptural, and artistic glory. There is something here to please anyone!

Sandy Magyar and her late husband purchased the three-plus-acre property

in 1975, and the gardens were begun in earnest about two years later. While someone comes in nowadays to mow lawns, edge planting beds, or fell trees, as necessary, Sandy does the rest of the work on her own. She meticulously labels plants, showing not only the name, but also the year of acquisition and the plant's source. She has a particular eye for placement and arrangement, and *edits* a mixed planting if something becomes overgrown, carefully pondering where a specimen should be relocated. When it comes to conifers, Sandy practices rather discreet pruning, when and if needed, preferring instead the forms that nature intends. Weeds cannot escape her gaze and, consequently, are nowhere to be seen. A hands-on gardener, she even spreads mulch.

It is safe to say that Sandy qualifies as a *collector*. Many of her prized specimens have been acquired from tailgate sales, for which ACS meetings are famous. She has a close, working relationship with Connecticut nurserymen, including our own John O'Brien. They and she search far and wide for the



Chrissie and John D'Esopo Garden - Avon, CT

exact cultivars she needs. Each conifer in her collection has a particular provenance; a story behind it, a special meaning. Her garden is a garden of memories.

Located in a rural neighborhood, Sandy's property is separated from the sparsely traveled country road by a classic New England fieldstone-wall, the weathered stones mellowed by lichen and moss, and punctuated here and there by aged examples of *Acer saccharum* (sugar maple). A rather husky *Acer griseum* (paperbark maple), dating from 1994, guards the driveway's entrance. Occupying a sloping site below the stone wall is Sandy's largest concentration of conifers, a mass-planting extending along a great arc. A towering specimen of *Sciadopitys verticillata* (Japanese umbrella pine) from 1985, easily 35-feet tall, dominates this bed. The next largest behemoth is a 23-year old *Picea abies* 'Acrocona' (red cone Norway spruce), full, lush, and dripping with cones. Weeping conifers are quite at home in this section of the garden.

Because of the slope, specimens are viewed somewhat from below, exaggerating their pendulous nature. *Cupressus nootkatensis* 'Green Arrow' and *C.n.* 'Sparkling Arrow' (cultivars of Alaska cypress), both have a home here. The winning combination of texture, color, and form is demonstrated to its fullest extent. One trio on display is the sculptural *Juniperus chinensis* 'Shimpaku' (shimpaku juniper), the frosted, curled needles of *Abies koreana* 'Horstmann's Silberlocke' (cultivar of Korean fir), and the tufted, short-needled *Pinus parviflora* 'Adcock's Dwarf' (cultivar of Japanese white pine). Going with the theme that every plant has a story, Sandy has left in place a crushed specimen of *Abies concolor* 'Piggelmee' (Piggelmee white fir). If one wonders why the plant appears flattened, it's because a bear sat on it!

The driveway slopes down to the residence. Acting as a buffer between the pavement and the pathway to the door is a layered planting of

Chamaecyparis obtusa 'Filicoides' (fernspray hinoki cypress), a billowy *Tsuga canadensis* 'Sargentii' (Sargent's weeping Canadian hemlock), and the gracefully drooping *Pinus strobus* 'Pendula' (weeping white pine). Sandy collects alpinines, as well; further evidence of her meticulous mindset. A series of raised beds and troughs occupy a level stretch of ground just beyond the house and driveway.

North of her residence in mixed woodland, Sandy indulges in shade perennials, rhododendrons, and even more cultivars of *Tsuga canadensis* (Canadian hemlock). Fellow

connoisseurs will notice a particularly fine *Stewartia pseudocamellia* (Japanese *stewartia*) with its heart-achingly beautiful, exfoliating bark. Skirting the property line on its north and west sides is a babbling brook, partway along which is a spring-fed catch-pond.

At the bottom of Sandy's garden is a beautiful *Cupressus nootkatensis* 'Pendula' (weeping Alaska cypress), inadvertently limbed up by marauding deer, but otherwise rather dense. In the center of everything is a broad expanse of verdant lawn, where ACS attendees will relax under a tent and savor a catered lunch. A mixed deciduous/



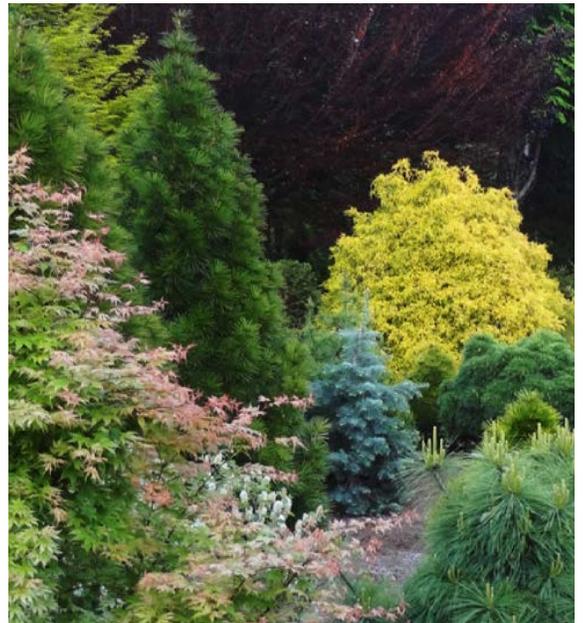
Sandy Magyar Garden - New Hartford, CT



O'Brien Nursery



A blast of color in John O'Brien's display beds, featuring *Abies concolor* 'Blue Cloak' (a cultivar of white fir), *Pinus strobus* 'Niagara Falls' and 'Horsford' (cultivars of white pine), and a monstrous 40-year-old *Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Filifera Aurea Nana' (golden threadleaf-Sawara cypress)



A tapestry of texture, form, and color at O'Brien Nursery

coniferous woodland provides a naturalistic backdrop, and the gentle sounds of flowing water ensure that tranquility reigns supreme!

Our third and final destination will be the nursery and garden of charismatic plantsman extraordinaire, John D. O'Brien. He has been an active ACS member for about 25 years, is well-known and respected in the nursery trade, and can easily count many hundreds of friends in this Society (and others) from all over the country. John bought the 11-acre property in 1998, and it contained nothing more than the house and barn. He immediately began moving plants over from his previous property, where he had spent 14 years. Currently 6- to 7-acres are under cultivation.

This Zone-6a garden serves a triple purpose. Not only is the garden a way to house and display an important collection, and to provide scionwood and cuttings for propagation, but it also serves to inspire and educate customers of the nursery. While selecting a young containerized *Sciadopitys verticillata* (Japanese umbrella pine) for instance, one may walk to the nearby display beds and see what that particular cultivar looks like as an older specimen. One special

corner of the garden features two such cultivars side by side, *S. v.* 'Golden Parasol' and 'Jeddeloh Compact', both pleasantly overwhelming through their sheer size. They are frequent subjects for photography by garden visitors.

As a longtime ACS member, John has brought home goodies from silent and live auctions and tailgate sales, from both national and regional meetings. In addition, unique and irreplaceable portions of his conifer collection originate from the late, great Dennis Dodge of Bethlehem Nursery. Acquisitions from legendary names such as Vermeulen, Okken, Waxman, Williams, Jaynes, Gulden, Verkade, Perran, and Stupka are also represented.

The display beds covering the entire front of the property slope down gently from street level to the residence and dwarf the grassy paths surrounding them. Chock-full of choice cultivars of *Abies*, *Chamaecyparis*, *Picea*, *Pinus*, *Sciadopitys*, *Taxus*, and *Tsuga*, the beds are interspersed with complimentary genera such as *Acer*, *Daphne*, *Ginkgo*, *Franklinia*, and *Stewartia*. Behind the residence and barn, high shade from light woodland provides display areas for John's many cultivars of *Hosta* on offer, for which he is well-known. A

great selection of woodland perennials and spring ephemerals are available, as well. From here, the property slopes down significantly. The shade is somewhat denser, and fine specimens of rhododendrons enliven the display beds. At the bottom of the slope, a long, picturesque pond (over which one may cross by wooden footbridge) acts as a mirror for the plant collection along its perimeter. Passing waterfowl are known to stop here, adding to the magic of the place. Beyond the treeline, a grassy field opens out, scattered through which are lengthy holding beds. Somewhat larger conifers are growing here and can be custom-dug for sale.

On the day of our visit, ACS members will enjoy following serpentine footpaths through sunny borders and cool woodland. Around every turn, we will discover an exciting new vista and plenty of inspiration. In addition to the gardens, O'Brien Nursery is a shopper's paradise, a chance to indulge in the rare and the beautiful. Who can resist such temptations?

John Waskiewicz has been an ACS member for several years and is a manager and propagator at Wanczyk Nursery in Hadley, Massachusetts.