Mountain Hemlock (*Tsuga mertensiana*)

Pine Family

**Why Choose It?**

Mountain Hemlock is an elegant, graceful, evergreen tree with an irregular shape that can create a beautiful focal point in the garden. While they grow naturally at high elevations they do well in lowland gardens, and add a wonderful alpine feel to the landscape.

**In the Garden**

Mountain Hemlock has so much to offer! Its relatively narrow, upright, and asymmetrical habit and its silvery, blue-green needles growing densely on the slightly drooping branches make it a natural for a garden focal point. They can be planted in groupings of uneven numbers or as a single specimen tree. These slow growing conifers also make great container plants either on their own where they can show off their unique shape, or combined with low growing natives such as Kinnikinnick or Evergreen Huckleberry.

**The Facts**

While Mountain Hemlock can reach heights of 60 feet or more in its native habitat, it is slow growing and much smaller in lowland gardens, growing to only 20 to 30 feet tall and staying quite narrow. They are not tolerant of heat and drought, and prefer moist, cool, organic soils in sun or light shade.

**Where to See It**

To see this tree growing in its natural habitat, you’re going to have to climb a little bit. Mountain Hemlock lives up to its name, growing at elevations from 4,000 to 7,000 feet, where they survive deep winter snowpacks and often take on a shrubby, stunted look.
And what else can it do?

Mountain Hemlock cones provide food for numerous bird species as well as squirrels, and older trees provide nesting sites for small birds. The generic name, *Tsuga*, is from Japanese and means “mother tree”.

You can find out more information about native plants, including where to buy them, from the Washington Native Plant Society.

www.wnps.org

Photo: Ben Legler

Native Plant Spotlights

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