NJCTGA News
Spring 2021

President's Message

SIGNS OF HOPE AND NORMALCY


Chris Nicholson

Hello everyone. As I write this I look out my window and I see leaves on the trees and brilliant sunshine. Spring is here and I couldn't be happier about that. At our last board meeting a few weeks ago we agreed that it would no longer be necessary to meet via Zoom. That makes me very happy. I hate Zoom. The reason that I stay on as President is because I love getting together with my friends on the board a few times a year. Yes, we mostly talk about the association and how we can make things better and stronger. But we always end up "talking shop" about our farms and our trees. I love that part of our meetings and now we can begin to return to normalcy and get things going in the right direction with face to face board meetings and the resumption of our association meetings.

Our twilight meeting will be held at Woodsedge Tree Farm in Belvidere, Tim and Mim Dunne's beautiful tree farm. I have been there many times over the years and am so very much looking forward to seeing some old friends and new members. We have made arrangements for core credits and have Richard Buckley attending from Rutgers. We have also decided to start at 5pm instead of the usual 6pm. This extra hour will give us some time to catch up with one another and have a sandwich or two. Please try and attend. Their farm is small and immaculate, their trees are beautiful.

The summer meeting is all set as well. When I say "summer", it is more like early fall. Our thinking was to try and miss the scorching hot summer weather and not

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Prepare Your Scouting Plan for Your Christmas Trees

Spring has sprung and it is time to start scouting your Christmas trees and prepare your integrated pest management (IPM) plan for the year.

By Heidi Lindberg and Jill O'Donnell, Michigan State University Extension

Now that spring has arrived, it is time to begin scouting your Christmas trees and prepare your integrated pest management (IPM) plan for the year. First, what is IPM? IPM is managing pests by not only using chemical control but also using cultural and biological tools in order to protect plant health and reduce environmental impacts. By implementing IPM, growers no longer spray for a certain pest based on a calendar date but seek to spray for pest insects when control will be most effective.

In addition, IPM programs can reduce the use of broad-spectrum pesticides that might also kill beneficial insects. When beneficial insects are also killed after a pesticide application, a grower can get into a continuous cycle of spraying for insects that would have been otherwise controlled with natural enemies present naturally in the environment.

What do I need to scout Christmas trees?

Regularly checking your fields throughout the growing season will help you detect any problems early and help avoid damage. The equipment you will need to scout Christmas trees are a hand lens (10x to 15x), scouting board, a clipboard and paper, pest ID materials, colored flagging tape, knife, bags or bottles, and a pair of hand pruners.

Another handy tool used to scout the bottom of branches is a mirror attached to a pole to reduce the amount of bending when scouting. The "IPM Basics for Christmas Trees" guide from PennState Extension provides an excellent overview of these tools.

Why am I scouting?

Scout your Christmas trees in order to look potential insect, disease, weed and nutri-

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Summer Meeting Set for Saturday, Sept. 25

Save the date for our annual summer meeting. Katrina Alger of the Alger Tree Farm in Califon has volunteered to host the 2021 Summer meeting on Saturday, September 25. Many thanks to Katrina and her crew!

Look for an invitation in the mail and an email update from Executive Secretary Donna Cole later this summer.

June Twilight Meeting at Woodsedge Tree Farm

Please join us on Thursday June 17 from 5:00 – 8:00 pm for our annual Twilight Meeting at Woodsedge Tree Farm - 118 Beechwood Rd., Belvidere, NJ. It will be a real treat to meet in person and see fellow growers face to face for the first time since January 2020!!! Mim and Tim Dunne will be our hosts and the NJCTGA will provide a light dinner of sandwiches, drinks and snacks. The meeting is free to current NJCTGA members.

Richard Buckley from the Rutgers Plant Diagnostic Laboratory will attend and we will scout fields for weeds, pests and disease and discuss treatments. Mim and Tim will have all their equipment out to view and they will discuss management of their operation. The NJ DEP Bureau of Licensing and Registrations has approved pesticide license continuing education credits for this meeting. You must be in attendance to receive the credits.

News from The National Christmas Tree Association

NCTA Board Meeting and National Tree and Wreath Contest

The 2021 meeting of the NCTA Board of Directors will be held August 5 at the Jefferson Landing Lodge, Jefferson, North Carolina. The 2021 NCTA National Tree and Wreath Contest will be held August 6 at Shatley Farms in West Jefferson, North Carolina in conjunction with the North Carolina Christmas Tree Association meeting.

NCTA Board of Directors Update

The NCTA Board recently held a virtual meeting to address items of business important to NCTA and the farm-grown Christmas tree industry and took the following action:

- Voted for NCTA to support the Farm Workforce Modernization Act introduced into the US House of Representatives, with the goal of improving the legislation in the Senate.
- Voted for NCTA to seek a coalition to pursue revisions to Federal Disaster programs that would be more applicable to Christmas trees enabling growers to better utilize this assistance.
- Approved updates to the National Tree and Wreath Contest rules for the 2021 contests.

President's Message

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have interference with anyone's summer vacation. Look for more information on this meeting as we get closer to the actual date. Barring any unforeseen pandemic uptick, the summer meeting will be held.

Our membership has remained strong, over 100, despite these difficult times. My sincerest gratitude goes out to all of our members for hanging together and sending in your dues. We also rely on our fundraisers which we have not have been able to conduct at our meetings, since we haven't had any meetings since the pandemic began. Despite this we are still financially stable although slightly strained. We have weathered the storm and can now begin to move forward in a positive direction.

I hope your transplants are in the ground and your herbicide is down. Perhaps we will be blessed this summer with plenty of rain and cool temperatures. I think we all deserve it. I hope to see you all at the twilight meeting. It will be a good one.

Christian

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njchristmastrees.org
Contact Donna Cole, Exec. Secretary, at (908) 735-4658 or email execsecretary@njchristmastrees.org
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News from the Christmas Tree Promotion Board

Christmas Tree Promotion Board Annual Seedling and Transplant Supplier Survey

In 2020 the Christmas Tree Promotion Board (CTPB) surveyed major seedling and transplant growers/suppliers to collect data that would provide a picture of the size and direction of Christmas tree production across the United States. This voluntary survey asked the supplier, to the best of their knowledge, to list the number of plants sold, or planted on their own operation, that were intended for use as Christmas trees. This data, collected for the years 2018, 2019 and 2020 provides an estimate of the number of Christmas trees being planted in the field each year, and potentially harvested in the years to come.

The CTPB plans to continue surveying seedling and transplant suppliers annually.

Visit **https://files.constantcontact.com/3de63f9d501/911e4682-b4f0-448d-8397-5df28045690d.pdf** for a copy of the survey results.

CTPB Seeks Board Members – Applications Due to CTPB June 1

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is seeking three nominees for the Christmas Tree Promotion Board. Seats open for nominees are two western region producers and one eastern region producer. USDA will appoint members to serve three-year terms beginning Jan. 1, 2022.

The board conducts an industry election to choose nominees to be considered for appointment by USDA. For applications, contact Christmas Tree Promotion Board Executive Director Marsha Gray at (800) 985-0773 or marsha@christmastreepromotionboard.org. You may also contact USDA Marketing Specialist Sue Coleman at (202) 378-2569 or Sue.Coleman@usda.gov.

The Christmas Tree Promotion Board is industry-funded and supports the national research, marketing and promotion of Christmas trees. The board is composed of 12 members including 11 producers from the western, central and eastern regions of the United States and one importer member. More information about the board is available on the board's website, **christmastreepromotionboard.org**.

Board members receive no compensation for their service, only reimbursement for reasonable travel expenses incurred in the performance of their duties as Board members.

AMS policy is that the diversity of the board should reflect the diversity of their industries in experience of members, methods of production and distribution, marketing strategies, and other distinguishing factors that will bring different perspectives and ideas to the table. When submitting nominations, the industry must consider the diversity of the population served and the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the members to serve a diverse population.

ConShape Labeled for Christmas Trees

New application tool used to apply ConShape plant growth regulator to leaders.

It is exciting to see years of research end in product registration, and a new tool in the Christmas tree grower's toolbox. In 2018, the CTPB funded research projects at Oregon State (Chal Landgren) and Michigan State (Bert Cregg) Universities exploring the use of PGRs to control leader length in firs.

Traditionally U.S Christmas tree growers use cultural methods to control leader length, while for some time European growers have used plant growth regulators (PGRs). The PGR trialed in these experiments was a form of abcissic acid (ABA) manufactured by Valent Bioscience. As a result of these experiments, applications on Turkish/Nordmann and Noble firs were very promising, and rates and techniques have been developed. This encouraged Valent Bioscience to fund further research at universities in major U.S. Christmas tree growing regions, to fine tune rates and application methods.

Applications for Fraser, Korean and Douglas fir are still in the trial stages. Very recently, their product, ConShape, became registered in Oregon and Washington for use on Christmas trees. Registration of ConShape is underway in Michigan, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin and is expected to be available by April 2021. Our limited research funds helped pave the way for expenditures by private industry to introduce a new leader length control option for Christmas tree growers.

Prepare Your Scouting Plan *continued from page 1*

tional problems along with beneficial insects. Scouting enables you to catch problems more quickly so that you can take action to correct or remediate the problem more quickly. You will also be able to see if previous treatments in an affected area were effective.

What am I scouting for?

First, it is essential to know the tree species that are present in your field as some insects or diseases affect some species and not others. For example, cooley spruce gall adelgid is an insect pest of Douglas-fir and spruces but is not a pest on true firs (Fraser, balsam and concolor) or pines. In contrast, spruce spider mite is a pest of spruces and true firs but not Douglas-fir or pines. With respect to diseases, Douglas-fir are susceptible to Rhabdocline or Swiss needlecast while spruces are susceptible to Rhizosphaera and Stigmina needlecasts. Learn more about which pests affect which plant species by accessing the "Michigan Christmas Tree Pest Management Guide."

While an IPM program doesn't promote calendar-based spray programs, you can use a calendar as a general rule of thumb to know when to be on the lookout for certain pests. For Michigan Christmas tree growers, there is a seasonal pest calendar in the "Michigan Christmas Tree Pest Management Guide" based on the time of year and tree species. For example, growers should be on the lookout for the following pests and diseases in their fields in early April:

- **Douglas-fir:** Cooley spruce gall adelgid
- **Pine:** Pales weevil, white pine weevil and Zimmerman pine moth
- **Spruce:** Admes mite, Cooley spruce gall adelgid, Eastern spruce gall adelgid, spruce spider mite, spruce gall midge, Diplodia tip blight and Phomopsis tip blight
- **True fir (Fraser, balsam and concolor):** Balsam twig aphid, eriophyid mites, spruce spider mite and fir needle rust

How much pest damage is acceptable?

Every farm manager has a tolerance or a threshold for damage for pests on their Christmas trees, but in general, the tolerance for damage decreases as the Christmas trees get closer to their harvest date. For example, you might be able to accept damage from spruce spider mites when trees are not close to harvest, but it will be imperative to find and treat trees as they are nearing harvest. The acceptable level of damage or aesthetic appearance of your Christmas trees will also depend on your market and price point.

How do I scout Christmas trees?

BASED ON AGE AND SIZE

Scouts should pay attention to different potential problems of trees at different ages. For example, during the first growing season the transplants should be evaluated for color, root rots and weeds. It is essential to determine what caused the death of seedlings and try to address the issue early. A Christmas tree nearing harvest should be frequently scouted (i.e., weekly) and be assed

Shaking branches over a white piece of paper will help identify smaller insect pests such as aphids and mites.

for issues that will affect needles and retention such as needlecasts, spider mites and aphids. Growers should examine 40 to 50 trees per acre.

SCOUTING PATH

When scouting, you can scout the block in a few different ways:

- **Block scouting:** Scout trees all within the same row, and once you reach the end you can move six to eight rows away (depending on the size of the trees) and continue.
- **Random walk scouting:** Pick trees randomly throughout the field in a zig zag pattern and always scout trees that look to be a problem from a distance.
- **Hot spot scouting:** Perform scouting in specific areas where problems have been observed and keep readdressing that area repeatedly throughout the season. Pay specific attention to low lying or shaded areas of the field that are prone to stay damp longer in the spring, making the trees in those areas more prone to root rots and diseases.

TREATMENT THRESHOLDS

The treatment threshold depends on the pest, tree species, age of the tree and if the pest in question is a quarantine pest. For example, pests that require preventative treatment include white pine weevil, gypsy moth and Pales weevil. You should be scouting and only spray as needed for mites, aphids and bagworms.

SYMPTOMS

Scouts should be looking for a variety of things when scouting fields: crooked tops, galls, stunted growth, missing branches, dead trees, browning/bronzing, curled or lost needles. Scouts should use a scouting board to shake shoots and observe any pests or predators that fall onto the board; this method is especially useful for small pests such as mites and aphids.

Those that are new to scouting Christmas trees should watch "Scouting for insects and disease." For example, scouts should look at 15 to 30 shoots

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What is IPM?

Integrated pest management (IPM) is a sound, sensible approach to dealing with pests—insects, plant diseases, weeds, and more—with methods that protect human health and the environment while saving money.

IPM is ***integrated*** because it brings together, or integrates, a range of biological, organic, cultural, mechanical, and chemical options for pest problems. And IPM is about more than just bugs—it's also about fungi and mildew, bacteria, viruses, weeds, and wildlife, all of which can be ***pests*** if they're in the wrong place at the wrong time. And it's about ***management*** because you can only manage pests—you can't get rid of them forever, no matter what anyone tells you.

IPM Basics

In coping with pests, the best offense is a good defense. If we had to sum up IPM in four words it would be: *Think before you spray.*

Step 1: Be prepared. What pests can you expect and how can you avoid them? Learn which tactics work—and under which conditions—should pests show up in your yard, garden, or doorstep. Learn about the beneficial organisms that can help you out.

Step 2: Think prevention. It's the first step in IPM.

Step 3: Stay alert. Scout routinely, keeping tabs on potential pests. Know your threshold—the point when a few pests become a few too many.

Step 4: Look at your options. Every tactic costs something. Will your benefits justify the costs? Know all the options before you commit.

Step 5: Choose and use. Choose tactics and tools that provide the best results while keeping environmental costs as low as possible and staying within your budget. Whatever option you settle on—do it right! Remember: the label is the law.

Step 6: Think again. How did it work? How much has the situation changed? What did you learn? What is left to learn?

Developed and managed by the Northeastern Integrated Pest Management Center, located at Cornell University.

Prepare Your Scouting Plan *continued from page 4*

per acre for spruce spider mites. There are guides such as the "Scouting Fraser Fir Christmas Tree Guide" (Publication AG-573) from North Carolina (NC) State University that provide excellent recommendations on scouting method, frequency and treatment thresholds for individual pests. This guide should be available again soon on the NC State Extension IPM of Christmas Trees website.

SOIL SAMPLING

Fertility is important for trees of any size. Fertility issues will become more apparent as trees become larger and have more needles. Fertility should be addressed before planting a new field with Christmas trees and readdressed yearly in order to plan fertilizer applications. Standard labs check pH, cation-exchange capacity (CEC), micronutrients and provide generic recommendations. The Soil Testing and Interpretation of Results for Christmas Tree Plantations from NC State Extension is an excellent resource to understand soil sampling in Christmas trees.

TRAPPING

Traps can be used to monitor insect emergence or determine populations. Two common trapping systems used in Christmas trees include tether traps for white pine weevil and yellow sticky cards for Douglas-fir and spruce gall midge.

Resources

There are numerous excellent recourses to use when scouting Christmas trees:

- **Michigan State University Extension Christmas Tree Website**
- **Michigan Christmas Tree Pest Management Guide**
- **Weed Control in Christmas Trees**
- **Christmas Tree Pest Manual, Third Edition**
- **IPM Basics for Christmas Trees from PennState Extension**
- **Integrated Pest Management for Christmas Tree Production: A Guide for Pennsylvania Growers**
- **Scouting Fraser Fir Christmas Trees, North Carolina State University Extension**

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NJCTGA Officers

Chris Nicholson, President
Cnicho6345@aol.com
973-865-6362

Tim Dunne, Vice President
tandmdunne@emabarqmail.com
908-453-2818

Donna Cole, Executive Secretary
execsecretary@njchristmastrees.org
908-735-4658

NJCTGA Directors

Andrew Alpaugh
frstree@comcast.net
609-397-0615

John Curtis
curtistreefarm@gmail.com
908-387-1225

Anne Edwards
wedwards@rcn.com
609-758-7729

Jim Giamarese
giamarese@comcast.net
908-813-9904

Matt Martini
cherryvillefarms@earthlink.net
908-806-4580

Bryan Stimpson
bryan.stimpson@nj.usda.gov

Larry Toth
ltnatoth@comcast.net
609-758-5855

John Wyckoff
wyckoff@embarqmail.com
908-489-2186

Welcome New Members!

Anne and Michael Lackland
Metuchen,
Middlesex County

Tom and Nicole Moke
Ort Farms
Long Valley, Morris County

NJCTGA Newsletter Ad Sizes & Rates

FULL PAGE
7.75" wide x 9.875" high..... $100

HALF PAGE
7.75" wide x 4.863" high..... $60

QUARTER PAGE
3.795" wide x 4.863" high..... $35

If possible, ads should be submitted in PDF format. Contact Exec. Secretary Donna Cole for additional details.

NJCTGA Grower Reports in From Down Under

New Jersey grower Chris Geckeler of Chris' Trees in Princeton sent this nice letter to our Executive Secretary and Treasurer Donna Cole about his experiences in Australia and with COVID there this past year. Donna wanted to share with all of you.

Hi Donna

Thanks for sending the dues and guide forms. I've filled out both and sent them back with my checks. You should receive an envelope with the same Sydney Opera house stamp on it - before the end of May.

You asked about Australia. Not quite sure what to say, but I've lived and worked here for more than half my life - and enjoy it thoroughly. Helps that I'm married to an Aussie Sheila.

The country is pretty laid back. They say its a bit like California 40 years ago.

We have about 25 Million people living on a continent the size of the USA. Much of the population is made up of migrants, many of whom arrived after me in 1978. Before WW2 most of the population were Aboriginals, Brits and Germans (who founded the wine industry). After WW2 there was a big influx of Southern Europeans - mostly Greek and Italian plus some Northern Europeans. After the Vietnam war there has been a large intake from the Asian nations. I suspect we are now one of the most multi-cultural countries in the world. Seems to work reasonably well.

The landscape is totally different to New Jersey. Firstly, its DRY ! The trees are mainly eucalypts although we have some sycamore and maples near us. About 90% of all people live within 100 miles of the oceans. Population is concentrated in the main capitol cities which have the same attractions and problems of cities everywhere. Last year we had bushfires at Christmas and all the wine growers around me lost their crop to smoke taint. This year has been wet so everything is green and the livestock have become fat.

While I have lived mainly in cities - Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, and Canberra we now are mainly in a little town called Yass. That's because we bought a small horse farm 3 years ago which is within commuting distance of Canberra where daughter works. The farm purchase was oriented toward daughter's love of horses. We thought it would help her into the property market and give us a place to visit from time-to-time.

Then came Covid and we hunkered down on the farm. The government here did a good job of protecting us. Everything shut down a year ago, but the government subsidized people out of work and businesses. We had occasional outbreaks of virus - particularly in Melbourne - but strict lock downs got on top of it. Living in the country was restricted, but relatively safe. We could get essentials of every kind, so there was no real hardship. Vaccines are now slowly being rolled out (not as fast as the US - but in an environment of much less risk). Its basically a question of supply since we only make one type of vaccine here. I'll get my final shot on the 4th of July. Then I hope to be allowed to travel to New Jersey in time for harvest this year. At the moment we are not allowed to fly out of the country.

Hope I haven't prattled on for too long.

All the best – Chris

Christmas Tree Species Profile: Nordmann fir (Abies nordmanniana)

By: Bert Cregg, Ph.D. Michigan State University, Department of Horticulture and Department of Forestry
Photo by Rick Bates, Ph.D. Pennsylvania State University, Department of Horticulture

One of the great things about working with Christmas trees is that we get to work with some beautiful and fascinating plants. Over the years, many species of pines, spruces, firs, and even cedars have been used as Christmas trees. Each species has its unique appeal and every species has a story. Beginning with this issue of the Great Lake Christmas Tree Journal, I will present profiles of interesting Christmas tree species used in the Great Lakes region and elsewhere. I'll discuss the basic biology and ecology of the species, highlight some of the advantages or concerns of the species for Christmas tree production, and throw in a little trivia or other titillating tidbits.

Nordmann fir (*Abies nordmanniana*)

Beauty, as they say, is in the eye of the beholder, but few can argue that Nordmann fir is among the most beautiful conifers found anywhere. Even famed plantsman Michael Dirr, who is not given to feint praise, calls Nordmann fir, "stately, elegant, perhaps the handsomest of the firs." Nordmann fir is by far the most popular Christmas tree species in Europe and there is increased interest in the species in the United States. The popularity of this species is due to several factors. First and foremost are the glossy, dark green needles, which are darker than almost any fir except for grand fir (Abies grandis). Nordmann fir needles are directed forward giving the upper surface of the branches a brushed, smooth appearance. There are two distinct white bands of stomata on the underside of the needles, which produces a silvery effect when the undersides of the branches are visible. But the needles are just part of the species' appeal. Nordmann fir has outstanding symmetrical form and a relatively open branch structure with distinct whorls. These traits are valued in the European Christmas tree market where a layered appearance and room for candles are desired.

Nordmann fir is a vigorous grower under plantation conditions. European customers, however, do not like sheared trees so growers rely on plant growth retardants or phloem wounding tools to control leader growth. Extensive research on the genetics of Nordmann fir has been conducted in Denmark and the Danes have typically favored the Ambrolauria seed source. However, tree improvement testing for U.S. environmental conditions and cultural practices is probably warranted. North Carolina State University geneticist John Frampton notes: "Ambrolauria has been widely touted as the best source of Nordmann fir in the United States, however, most Americans do not realize that this is based on the European preference for slow growth. In reality, other faster growing Nordmann fir sources are likely to be preferable for culture under an American shearing regime". American Christmas Tree Journal 43 (2): 4–11.

In its native range, Nordmann occurs on calcareous soils and therefore may tolerate a wider range of pH than other firs. Like most firs, however, Nordmann fir needs adequate drainage for best growth. Various sources list Nordmann fir as hardy from zones 4–6 or 4–7. In either case, it is well adapted in most of lower Michigan. In the exotic fir species trial initiated by Dr. Mel Koelling at Kellogg Forest near Battle Creek, Nordmann fir has grown well. In addition, the Nordmann fir trees we transplanted from Kellogg Forest in 2003 continue to do well at our Horticulture Research Stations in East Lansing, Clarksville, and Traverse City. This broad adaptability suggests that Nordmann fir has significant potential as a Christmas tree species in much of Michigan. Nordmann fir also responds well in container production. During the 8th international Christmas Tree Research and Extension Conference in Denmark (see related article in this issue of Great lakes Christmas Tree Journal), conference participants toured Gl. Kirstineberg Planteskole, Europe's leading producer of container-grown Nordmann fir. The nursery produces approximately 100,000 three- to four-foot tall Nordmann firs as living Christmas trees each year. The trees are grown in three-gallon containers in a Pot-in-Pot system for up to four years to reach marketable size. The Kirstineberg nursery has worked extensively on their packaging, marketing trees to retail garden centers and as business gifts via direct shipping.

Fast Facts on Nordmann fir: Native range: The native range of Nordmann fir forms a crescent along the east end of the Black sea in the mountains of Turkey, Georgia and Russian Caucauses. It occurs at elevations between 3000 and 7000 feet in areas with rainfall in excess of 40" per year. Related species: The taxonomy of the Mediterranean firs is muddled due in part to wide variation within species and also hybridization among species. Turkish fir and Trojan fir are closely related to Nordmann fir and are sometimes listed as separate species (*Abies N bornmülleriana* and *A. equi-trojani*, respectively) or as sub-species or varieties of *Abies nordmanniana*. Ornamental cultivars: Nordmann fir is an outstanding landscape ornamental as a straight species. In addition, the American Conifer Society's Conifer Database (www.conifersociety.org) lists 14 named cultivars of *A. nordmanniana*, a handful of which are available from specialty nurseries. 'Golden spreader' is a dwarf, spreading form with bright gold foliage. 'Tortifolia' is a conical, intermediate grower (6–12" per year) with upturned needles. 'Prostrata' is a prostrate, ground covering form with dark green needles.