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**A scene from the Stegmaier garden
featured inside this issue**

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Tsuga canadensis 'Little Granny' Profile of a witches' broom

Article & Photos by Richard A. Larson

In the fall of 1997, I became aware of a witches' broom growing in the village of Granville, Ohio, just a few miles northwest of The Dawes Arboretum. The late Everett Albyn, a fine plantsman during his lifetime and originator of Albyn's prostrate Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris* 'Albyn's'), had noticed this hemlock broom during his consultations with the owners, Dorothy and Richard Mann. Naturally, I felt compelled to take a look and, accompanied with a volunteer of mine, made arrangements with Dorothy Mann during the latter part of November to see the broom and to take cuttings.

My first look at it was from a distance of about 200 yards on an adjacent street that ran parallel to the owner's property. The broom could be clearly viewed from this vantage point, as it was suspended precariously on a lower branch that was quite distended from the main canopy of the tree. It appeared to be a nearly perfect, dark green little ball – a lollipop on a stick. After a brief salutation with the owner and a cup of coffee, I proceeded to view this broom "up close and personal" and I set myself to the real task at hand the propagation of this anomaly.

Most brooms look better from a distance than from close up and this one was no exception. The hemlock broom was an old timer, very densely branched and about 4 feet (1.2 m) in diameter. It

was so tight that its lower branches were dying out from overcrowding and self-shading. It had been mostly neglected because the owner was entirely unsure of the proper maintenance and so had left it alone. It required about an hour to remove the dead wood from the broom and in the process, of course, I secured more than enough propagules to take back with me.

By removing a few large branches from the main stem, I exposed this broom to more light; these overtopping



Tsuga canadensis broom

branches might, I judged, hasten its decline by casting too much shade upon it.

I proceeded to stick a number of cuttings upon my return to The Dawes. The propagation of hemlocks from cuttings can be problematic; some clones root easily at a rate of 80 percent or higher while others root poorly or not at all. Fortunately, I succeeded to root about 50 percent of the cuttings by lightly wounding them and applying auxin at a rate of 5,000 ppm. This rate of success surprised me since the relatively non-vigorous and mature condition of brooms in the wild usually prevents a high rate of success. I bolstered my propagation efforts by successfully grafting several scions the following January.

In the spring of 2000, a grafted specimen was planted in the conifer glen, and it has been growing slowly in its original spot since that time. In six and a half years, the broom has grown to just 12.5 inches (31 cm) tall by 26 inches (66 cm) wide. Its needles retain an excellent dark green winter color. I liken this broom to *Tsuga canadensis* 'Minima', a beautiful clone of long-time standing, but it stays lower and grows a little wider than 'Minima'.

In January of 2007, I registered this clone with the Royal Horticultural Society in England under the name *T. canadensis* 'Little Granny', which I felt provided a reference to the location of the original broom.

There is, of course, a wide array of wonderful hemlock brooms to choose from but 'Little Granny' is one of the better ones I have seen, and its slow growth should make it a desirable addition to any dwarf conifer or rock garden collection.



Tsuga canadensis 'Little Granny'

About the author: Richard Larson, a long-time ACS member and supporter, has been Plant Propagator at The Dawes Arboretum since 1988. He holds B.S. and M.S. degrees, both in horticulture, from the University of Wisconsin. At The Dawes, he manages the nursery and is responsible for acquiring plants, exchange and propagation, holding plant clinics, and teaching classes in-house and for various organizations. He writes for The Dawes Arboretum's *Journal* and for *Happenings*, its monthly publication, as well as for other professional publications.