

# The Hibbard Broom, the "VW Bug" Broom and 'Wilson Park', Three Broom Stories

By Doug Wilson

## The Hibbard Broom

(In answer to this Editor's question upon seeing the Hibbard Broom or whether or not it beat out the Merrell Broom in size, Doug Wilson wrote the following account.)

I don't know about Hibbard winning over the Merrell Broom in Michigan's Hidden Lake Gardens' Harper Collection of Dwarf and Rare Conifers. Merrell certainly has a better home where it can be enjoyed by many.

I'll try to keep this short. I drive 22 miles each way to perform my Oregon Garden conifer garden tasks. I choose to use a secondary route because it lacks traffic, is relaxing and gets me in a good mood to tackle projects. This 125' doug-fir is on my route. I first noticed it about six years ago when my wife and I were attending an evening summer event at the garden and she was driving. I scared the hell out of her when I screamed: "Stop!" The size of this monster blew me away and, to be sure, it was my first broom discovery.

The next day I interviewed two nearby farmers, and, indeed, they were aware of its existence, but had no knowledge of anyone collecting scions. Locals theorized it had been hit by lightning. Several months later I was heading up our first ACS conifer garden work day and got Don Howse and his partnered nursery, R&R, to have a look at it.

They were enthusiastic, but reminded me that doug-fir brooms tend to be of little commercial value, and collection and propagation were more likely to be an exercise in conifer-related fun and little appreciated outside of circles of the initiated. In late January of that year a friend, Nick Gehrig, and I (after receiving



*Pseudotsuga menziesii* (Hibbard Broom)

permission from the landowner) proceeded to shoot quite a few shot-gun shells containing ball loads into the tree. A very few pieces fell that day. However, after a windy night, I returned and picked up a large trash-bag full of tightly congested foliage. I turned these over to Don and later learned that three flats had been grafted, and the take was over 90%.

About two years later I was invited to Randy and Rita Osters' nursery to pick up 20 one gallon grafts. I handed a few off to friends and sold the remainder in the Oregon Garden center store for \$35.00 each as a fund raiser for our phase II conifer project. I planted one in my front yard and 2 in the Oregon Garden.

One of the conifer garden plantings bit the dust this summer. The other, however, is thriving and has decided to grow in an extremely fastigiata habit, sporting bright silver needles. I'll be taking cuttings on this 7' by 18" mutation this winter.

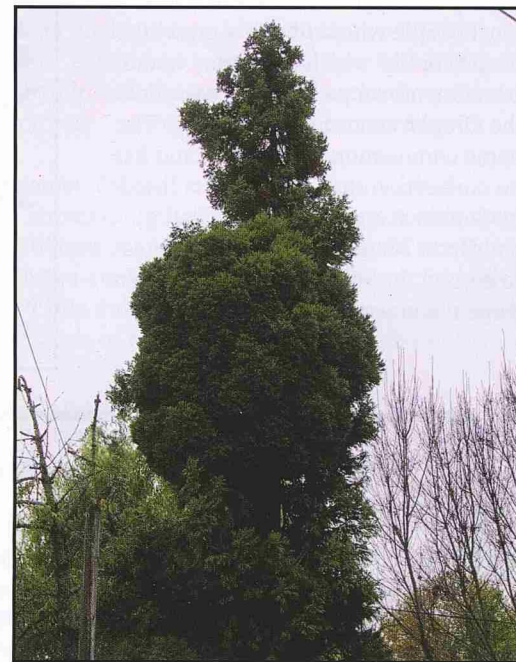
The one in my yard, a globe shape, grew a single cone in spring of 2011 which of course got me a bit excited. But nothing this year.

Oh yes, the name "Hibbard" is derived from the country lane it grows near. I believe Hibbard is the name of the pioneering farm family in that area. I've found no surviving Hibbards.

Since my induction into BHI (broom hunters international), I've found two additional significant brooms. One is a *Picea engelmannii* called 'Wilson Park' after the downtown Salem, Oregon park where it was found, and a *Cryptomeria japonica* broom, the size of a Volkswagen Beetle, scions from which I hope to collect this winter.

## The "VW Bug" Broom

Imagine a VW Bug stuck to the side of a tree trunk and you have an approximate perspective for size and shape. I approached the homeowners early last summer. Their intention was to have an arborist remove the strange growth. I groveled and begged on the door step of the homeowners for a stay of execution. They regard it as an offensive anomaly on their *Cryptomeria japonica*. It can be a hard sell to let the uninitiated know they may have something unique growing alongside their hybrid roses, but that its commercial value will unlikely be realized, at least



*Cryptomeria japonica* witch's broom  
Photo by Brian Jacob



Photo by Brent Markus

anytime soon. I drive by the witch's broom several times a week with my fingers crossed. So far so good.

***Picea engelmannii***  
**'Wilson Park'**

The witch's broom looked to me like a fairly large bird's nest, or perhaps a squirrel cache. I removed the entire broom with a pole pruner and, since I knew Rare Tree Nursery had a good supply of spruce understocks, I handed it off to them. They grafted three flats, most of which have survived and have grown

well past the first year. I took one to the Western Region meeting in Petaluma, and it sold at auction for \$150. It now grows in Ken Jordan's wonderful collection in Roseburg, Oregon. I picked up four more yesterday to hand off to a few local people who will enjoy growing a dwarf conifer which originated in our own downtown park. It was adjacent to the Oregon state capitol building. The name commemorates the park and has no connection to my name. It is listed in Conifer Kingdom's sales catalog, and Brent Markus tells me he intends to correct the spelling of this miniature Engelmann spruce.

