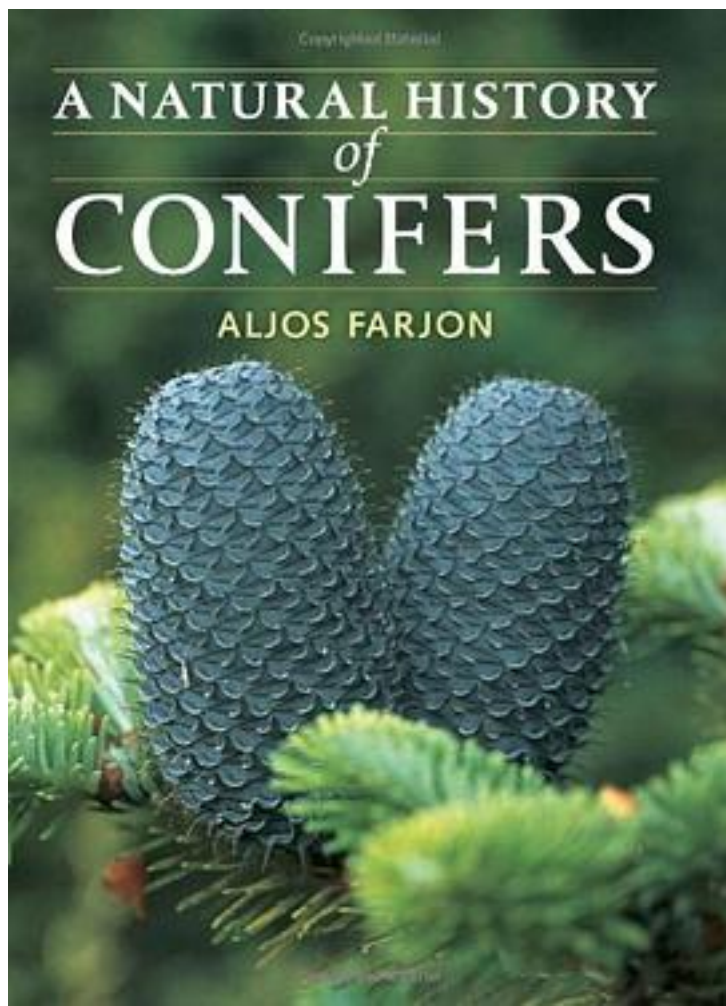


A Natural History of Conifers



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Conifers are the most diverse, interesting, beautiful trees in the world, so why is it that our gardens are home to so few species? Part of the reason lies in their economic

importance which, by focusing attention on relatively few species, has limited our understanding of one of the most remarkable plant groups on earth. Leading expert Aljos Farjon provides a broader perspective with this compelling narrative that observes conifers from the standpoint of the curious naturalist. It starts with the basic question of what conifers are and continues to explore their evolution, taxonomy, ecology, distribution, human uses, and issues of conservation. As the story unfolds many popular misconceptions are dispelled, such as the notion that all conifers have cones (untrue), and the extraordinary diversity of conifers begins to dawn as Farjon describes the diminutive creeping shrub *Microcachrys tetragona*, whose strange seed cones resemble raspberries, and the prehistoric-looking *Araucaria meulleri*. The taxonomic diversity of conifers is huge and Farjon goes on to relate how, over the course of 300 million years, these trees and shrubs have adapted to survive geological upheavals, climatic extremes, and formidable competition from flowering plants. Scarcely less remarkable is his explanation of how conifers, with only 627 species, grew to occupy every continent on earth ranging from the high latitudes to the tropics. This illuminating review will fascinate plant lovers who wish to discover the extraordinary relatives of ordinary garden conifers, natural historians, who will relish seeing conifers reviewed in a broad context, and all who seek to learn more about the early history of life on our planet.

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