

**OFF THE BEATEN PATH:
Hidden Treasures of the Arboretum**
Morinda Spruce

BY DANIEL MOUNT

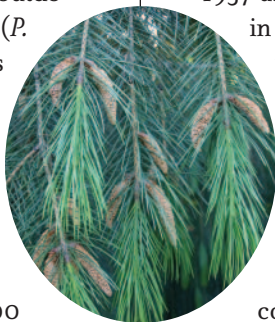
Weeping foliage of the Arboretum's largest morinda spruce, on the north end of the Sorbus Collection.
(Photo by Daniel Mount)

Morinda spruce (*Picea smithiana*) is a subalpine conifer endemic to the Himalayas. In its home range, it is a large conical tree reaching up to 70 meters tall. Unlike most members of the genus, which have short, spikey needles, this spruce bears distinctively long, soft needles. It also has a dramatic weeping habit, outdoing that of our native Sitka spruce (*P. sitchensis*). The tree's large, pendulous cones are covered in golden pearls of resin, from which it derives its common name "morinda," meaning "the honey of flowers" in Nepalese.

Morinda spruce thrives in the warm, moist monsoon climate of the Himalayas, at elevations between 2300 and 3750 meters. At lower elevations, it grows in mixed forests with deciduous species such as oaks, maples and cherries; at higher elevations, it's found in pure stands, or with other conifers such as pines, firs and hemlocks. Harvesting throughout its range for construction and paper pulp has taken a heavy toll on populations over the centuries.

In the Arboretum, the species is represented by nine specimens. The largest and best example, growing at the north end of the *Sorbus* collection, arrived in 1958 as seed from a specimen growing in the Tasmanian Botanical Gardens in Hobart. Only one seed of the shipment germinated, and the resulting seedling was planted in 1968 when it was nearly five feet tall. It flourishes behind a large grouping of *Deutzia*, and just feet away from the Broadmoor golf course.

Very close to it is another specimen, which arrived in 1958 as a scion from the Morris Arboretum in Philadelphia. It was also planted



out in 1968 at about five feet tall. It's easy to compare the vigor of a seedling to a cutting when looking at these two trees: The seedling has greatly outpaced the scion in growth.

You can find another mature morinda spruce across Arboretum Drive, in the native matrix south of the Magnolia Collection. It arrived in 1957 as a small tree from Kingsville Nursery, in Maryland, and was planted out three years later. Growing in the shade of other trees, it has become tall and thin but still sustains the characteristic long needles and drooping branches nearly to the ground.

A little farther west on the trail that leads through the Asiatic maple collection to Azalea Way, is a young and lovely specimen planted in 1983. It arrived as seed from Kew Gardens, having been collected at 2600 meters in Kashmir. This well-sited tree seems just as at home at these lower elevations as it might be on the slopes of the Kashmiri mountains. It should prove to be a treasured tree in the Arboretum for decades to come.

Three new morinda spruces were planted in 2009. They arrived from Quarry Hill Botanical Garden, in California, as seedlings grown from wild-collected seed, and were promptly planted into the native matrix to the west of the Pacific Connections interpretive shelter. They are vigorous youngsters that we hope will create a beautiful backdrop to those gardens as they mature. ♪

DANIEL MOUNT is an estate gardener, garden writer and member of editorial board of the "Bulletin." He lives on a small farm in the Snoqualmie Valley. Read more of his reflections on plants and gardening at www.mountgardens.com.

Honoring Mr. Smith

Picea smithiana has many common names besides morinda spruce, including Indian spruce, Tibetan spruce and West Himalayan spruce. The specific epithet is named for James Edward Smith, the gardener at the Hopetoun House estate outside Edinburgh, Scotland, who started the first seed brought to the West in 1818. The tree, which he planted in 1824, is still thriving at the estate today.