



SRGC

Bulb Log Diary

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*Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Nana' and 'Minima' plus *Tsuga canadensis*



Some weeks we have so many plants in flower that I have to decide which ones to write about then there are weeks, such as this, when the garden enters what appears to be a quiet stage with not many flowers and I have to look for something to write about. Then dawns the realisation that there is such a variety of plants in our kind of garden that there

are always subjects and that green is also a colour that deserves our attention. Then I start looking, ending up taking so many pictures that once more I have to decide what to leave out. The view from my work table when looking to my right features on the front cover it shows a bonsai *Tsuga canadensis* sitting proudly above a trough with two dwarf conifers *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Nana' and 'Minima'. The two dwarf forms of *Chamaecyparis obtusa* were part of our first mail order of plants sent from what was then Potterton and Martin, now just [Pottertons Nursery](#), in the later part of 1970s. The plants were tiny and for many years, when we were still showing plants, we grew them in clay pots and took them around Scotland to the various SRGC Shows. When we bought the large trough decorated to mimic the Iron Age [Gundestrup cauldron](#) we planted it with these two conifers and they have grown there ever since.

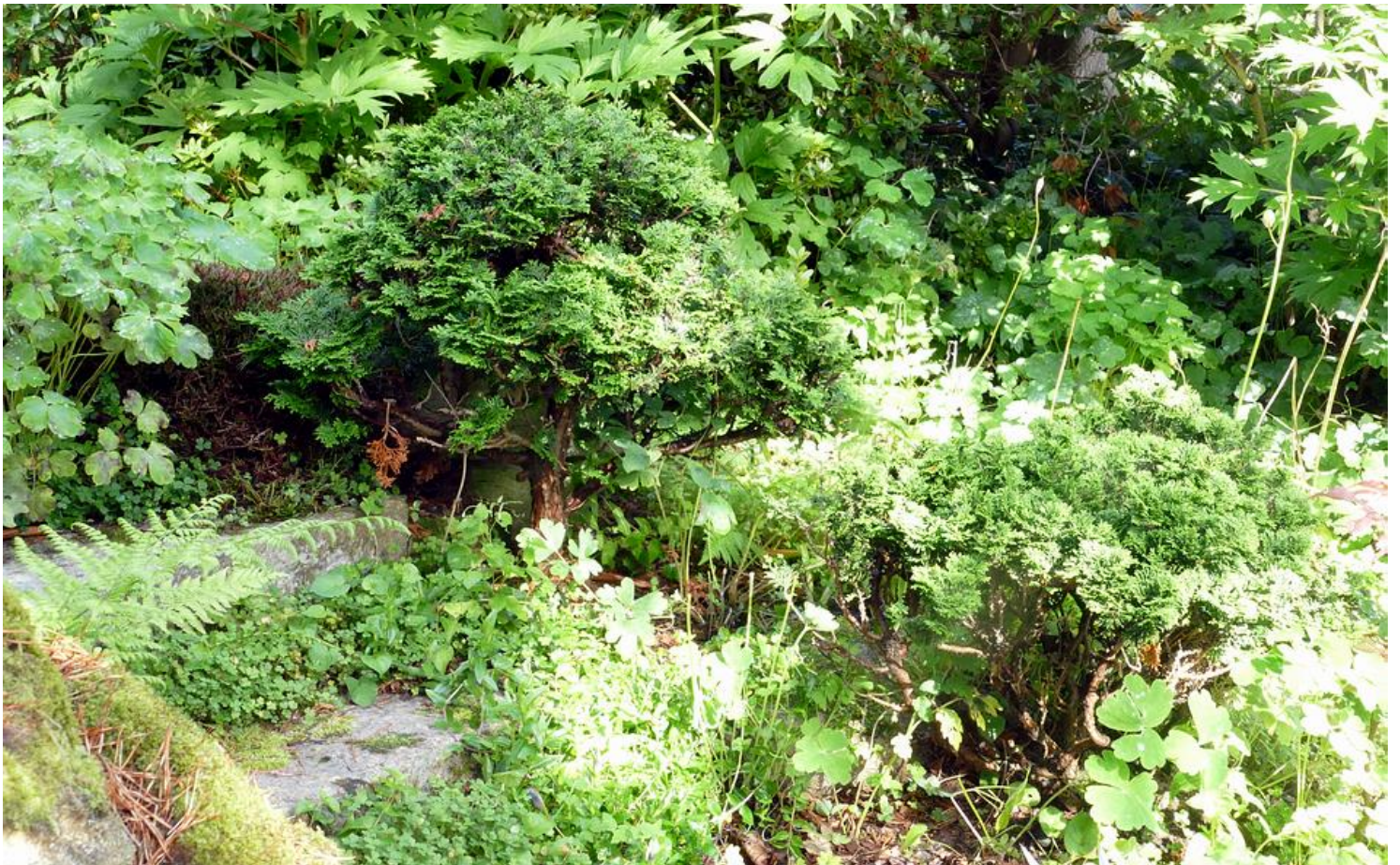
Whenever we get new plants my instinct it to propagate them and so as soon as the original plants had reached a reasonable size I started taking cuttings and so those two original plants have increased with some being planted around the garden and others given away. They root quite readily producing plants with a range of habits depending on where on the plant the cutting came from. Cuttings rooted from the tip growth will have a more upright habit while those taken from side growths have a more branching spreading habit.



A spreading form of *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Minima' rooted from a side growth.



Upright form of *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Nana' rooted from a tip growth.



Two forms of *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Nana' the one on the left rooted from a tip growth while the right hand one was rooted from a side growth.

**Chamaecyparis  
obtusa 'Nana'**

I have done some pruning of this *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Nana' to minimise the size and reveal its trunk which as you can see is relatively thick, making this form a good subject for turning into bonsai trees.

Growing in the ground they can make good growth and reach that size in around 20 years while the *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Minima' shown below is growing very slowly in a shallow trough with a restricted root run.



**Chamaecyparis obtusa 'Minima'**



Another cultivar of **Chamaecyparis obtusa** is '**Nana Gracilis**' which is still described as a dwarf but will grow larger than the previous two forms but significantly smaller than the true species, which is a forest tree native to Japan. Both the cloud pruned tree viewed from our front door and the bonsai tree on the right are '**Nana Gracilis**' and exactly the same age: the one we planted in the garden is 3-4 metres tall while the bonsai is 70cms, not including the pot and root ball.



### **Pinus nigra**

With some trees you can get a good indication of the age from the nature of their bark - the layered fissured form of this pine shows considerable age and I know that it is forty plus years old – see below.



***Pinus nigra***

It has always grown in a pot and it is a remarkable testament to the toughness of pines that it has survived so long growing in such a restricted container with only occasional watering or feeding becoming such a character and reminding me of some ancient specimens that I admired growing in tough rocky conditions in the mountains.



**Sedum pachyclados**

This is our original plant of *Sedum pachyclados* that we panted in a beautiful 18century sandstone urn. For a



number of years it just formed a neat dome of grey green foliage in the centre but gradually over years of growth it has cascaded downwards totally obscuring the urn. This leads on to the question that can be asked in many situations around the garden should I trim the extensive growth right back again? Like most sedums it is very easily propagated so we have several offspring growing in other troughs and containers.



Similar to all the plants I am showing this week this South American plant that has been with us for many years. We were given a cutting by Mike and Polly Stone who did not know the name, not even the genus, and the fact that we have never managed to identify it does not distract from its value as a trough or rock garden foliage plant.



It is similar in effect to a small Azorella with young plants producing tight evergreen cushions growing outwards to form mats as they mature –it would be an ideal crevice garden plant.





***Celmisia sessiliflora***



While it does flowers sporadically most years, *Celmisia sessiliflora* is another subject that we have grown for so many years primarily as a foliage plant. The lovely silver grey foliage has gradually grown to almost take over this trough acting as a handy source for taking cuttings every year to ensure we preserve this plant in our garden by always having new plants.

The dominant plant that has taken ownership of this trough is **Dianthus alpinus** with a few primula, a saxifrage and a dwarf Hebe at the top left edge. The name of that Hebe has an interesting story that I share below.



When Fred Carrie was running his nursery he would sometimes come and get some cutting material from our garden and one time he liked a small compact Hebe which had self seeded in one of our raised beds, perhaps a hybrid between some of the many species we were growing. Fred just wrote Hebe - Ian Young on the bag of cuttings which he took back to the nursery

where his propagator assistants went to work and produced a large batch of plants for wholesale to garden centres. The next thing I knew a few years later was my sister phoned to say she had just bought a Hebe 'Ian Young' in a garden centre; was this anything to do with me!! Obviously Fred's assistant had taken what he wrote on the bag as being the name of the plant and had labelled up all the plants for wholesale.



I face a similar dilemma to the sedum hiding the urn in this trough where the growth of the saxifrages has all but completely hidden the limestone rock landscape. There was a point of growth that was perfect with a nice balance between exposed rocks and plant growth in this trough but then, just as in the larger garden, growth continues until it becomes a green hump.



There is a temptation to cut the plants back to reveal some of the rock again but this green mound has a certain charm that I like especially the way the light green rosettes of *Saxifraga brunonis* have infiltrated those of the silver sax by means of being dumped there by their red runners. A few weeks ago I showed pictures of propagating the tiny *Saxifraga brunonis* plantlets by placing them in a pot which can be seen on the left, where the plants are slowly getting bigger.



**Campanula poscharskyana** has out-survived some of the others I planted and taken over the domain of this trough but you will notice a cluster of *Saxifraga brunonis* have made the short hop by runner from the adjacent trough and are now establishing themselves on the exposed limestone.



**Campanula poscharskyana**

Here is the same trough with the campanula flowering a month ago.



Watching which plants survive in troughs is a constant learning process and you should always be propagating, by whichever means, from those that do survive. You can see from the original planting, shown below, where we planted out a number of small plants, many just rooted cuttings, and the long term survivors that have grown and spread include *Antennaria dioica*, *Erigeron scopulinus*, *Raoulia australis* and *Sedum pachyclados*.



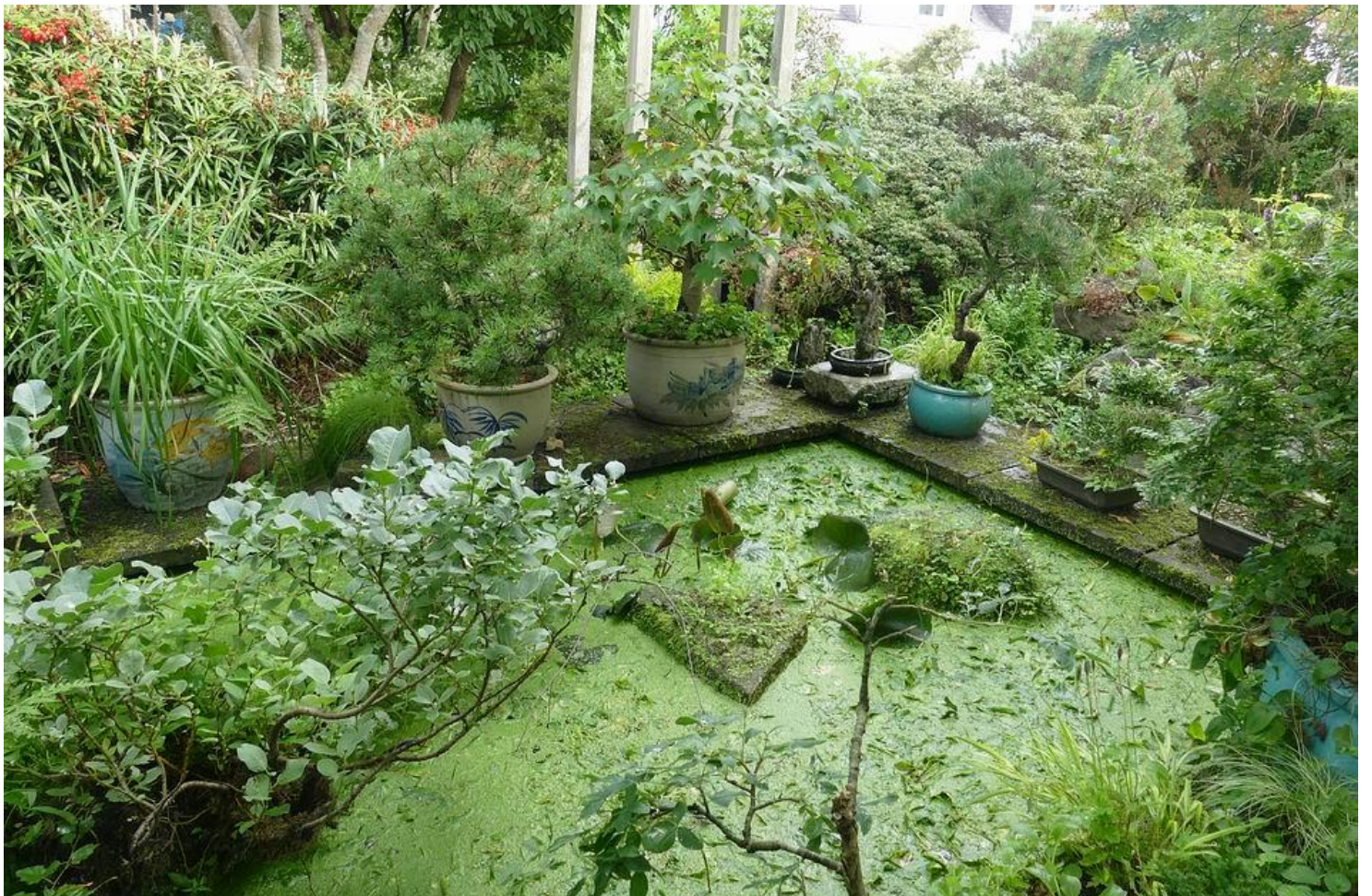


These are a few more of the troughs of varying size that are placed around the slab bed area.





Slab bed area with troughs.



Another area where we grow plants in containers is around - and in - the pond.



I hesitate to call these bonsai except in the widest definition of “a tree growing in a pot” because they are not shaped and maintained to the level I expect of a bonsai but all have been growing in pots for tens of years. Some like the acer on the right, which I grew from seed, started off

life in the garden before being lifted because we did not have room to let it grow to maturity. Not wanting to waste it I decided to give it an alternative life by cutting down the trunk, potting it up and re-growing some branches.

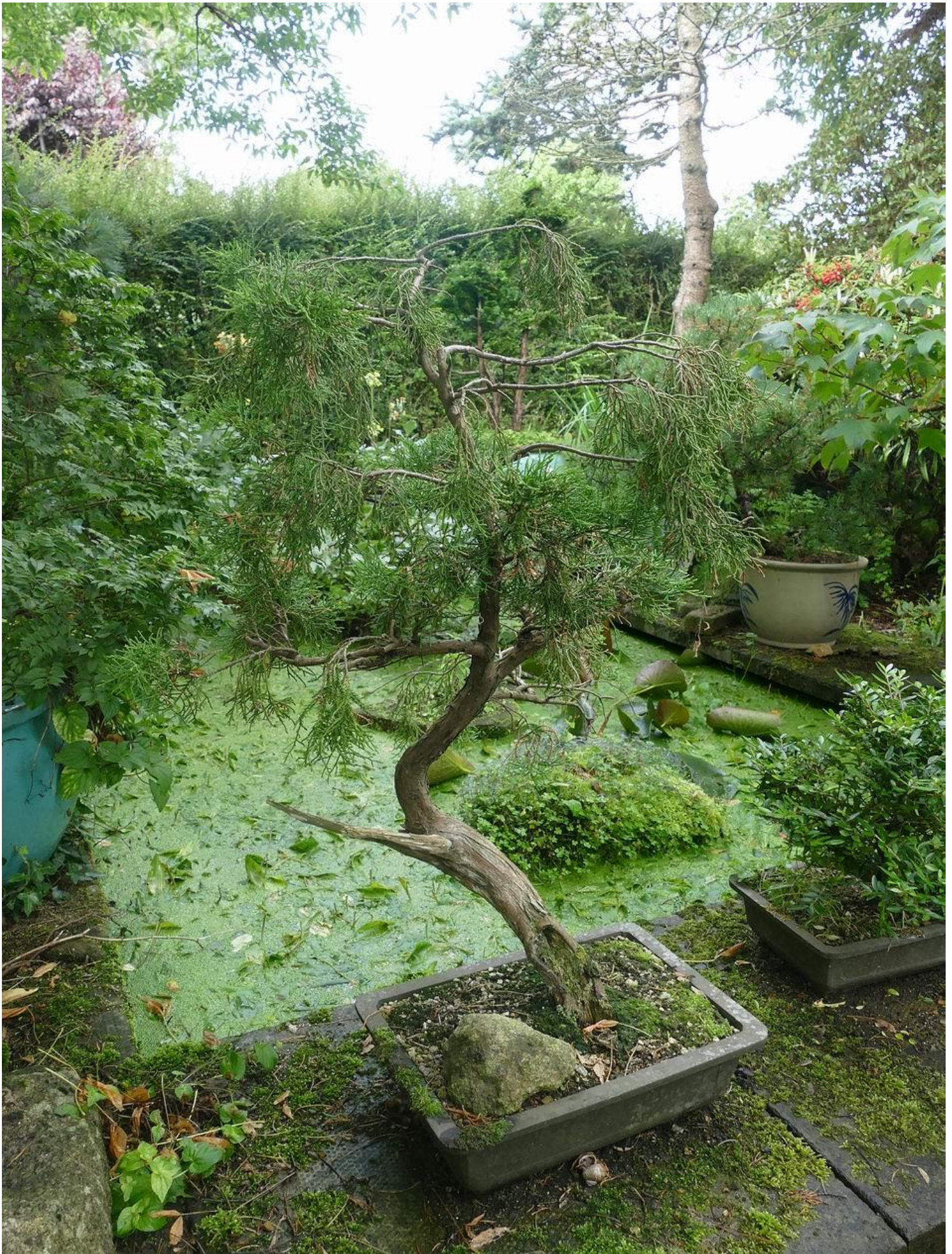


These trees in pots include a seedling from the *Lonicera nitida* hedge – it’s the small one in the middle.

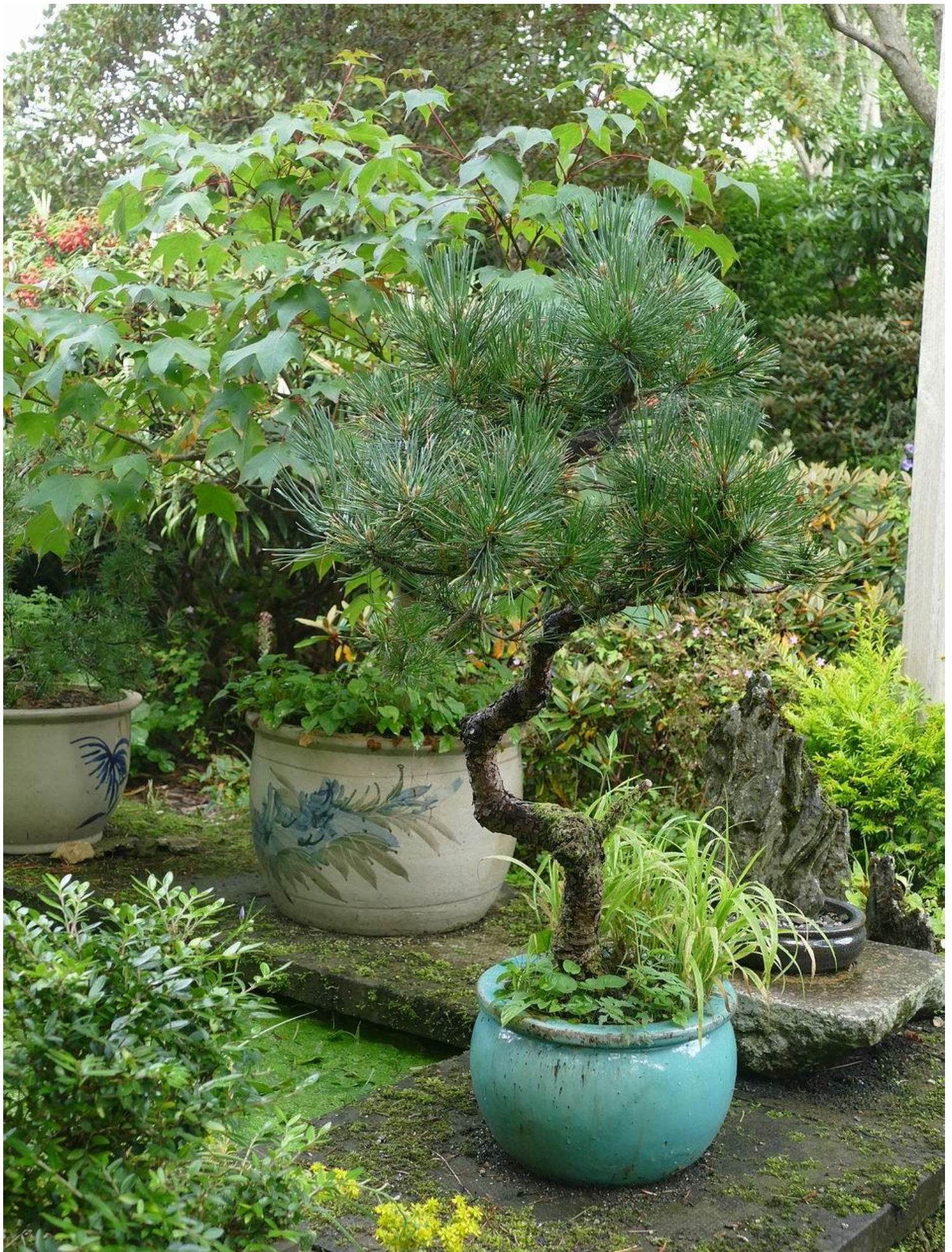




A number of these trees in pots are recycled from the garden such as this *Chamaecyparis obtusa* which became a dense shrub outgrowing its place in the garden so was lifted, had most of the foliage and branches cut away to reveal some interesting trunks and given a new life in a pot.



Similarly this is a small part of a **Juniperus horizontalis** that outgrew its space, so it was lifted and the entire plant including root ball was cut in two – I gave one half away this is the other planted upright in this pot 30 years ago.



Because they can withstand long dry periods Pines make great subjects to grow in pots as you can tell from the rough twisted trunk this one is also of a significant age with its own garden of plants seeded in the pot to keep it company.....