

Tree of the Month, February 2013: **Cristate Japanese cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica* 'Cristata')**

One of the strikingly oddest-looking trees that we have at VanDusen is *Cryptomeria japonica* 'Cristata', a cultivar of Japanese cedar. 'Cristata' has foliage that garden visitors exclaim over; pointed branches with needle-like leaves, normal for *Cryptomeria*, are intermixed with branches that have fused together into bizarre green "cockscombs", a mutation known as fasciation. This fasciation occurs when the apical meristem, or growing tip of a branch, changes shape from round to crescent; the branch then starts to grow side-to-side instead of getting longer, resulting in flat ribbons of tissue instead of pointed shoots. Fasciation can be caused by an infection, physical damage, a hormonal imbalance or, in the case of 'Cristata', a genetic mutation in the cells of the growing tip. Fasciation is found in other kinds of plants as well, including saguaro cacti, fantail willows and beefsteak tomatoes.