

Plant Lover's Almanac

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In my last Almanac I talked of the foliage, fruits, and fungi of Fall. Perhaps I should move on and talk about Thanksgiving plants of the near future. For example, think of all the key native plants used for our fall harvest celebration: From pumpkins to pecans, from cranberries to blueberries - and the hard ciders at Bent Ladder Cidery near Doylestown and elsewhere. But let us just enjoy our holiday eating and drinking.

For now, I cannot quite let this exceptional Fall color go. So, here are two final fall color favorites, the second one with some interesting questions for gardeners.



Korean maple fall foliage (JC)

Ethan agreed on the fall color, but noted that in his experience *Acer pseudosieboldianum* (Ethan, ever the botanist, would use the Latin binomial), it sort of became gangly, unruly, and not quite so elegant with age. Fine by me; I represent that description. Well, of course he was right and it has become less elegant with age, perhaps, though still pleasing, but from early bloom and foliage and through the season it is a good to great Japanese-style maple in the landscape.



Korean maple fall foliage (JC)

It is a native of China and Korea and is a specialty small maple (15-25) with both delicate and spectacular features. In the spring, the new foliage is soft and covered with downy hairs. Flowers are hanging in clusters and give a delicate appearance, paired with the new foliage. Leaves have about 10 lobes and are 4 or 5 inches across. Plant in sun-dappled partial shade or in full sun if protected from hot, dry sites. Excellent hardiness.

But where it is most spectacular is its fall foliage – really until a week ago. In Autumn – all my life I had never imagined leaves such as these. Not only the range of different colors on the tree overall: purples and yellows, oranges and greens, reds and... well you get the picture. But something I notice and appreciate more and more regarding fall foliage, the different pigment profile on individual leaves at a given point in time. Korean maple is my entry for the most spectacular in this regard, though sweetgum gives it a run for the money.

Korean maple. Ever since Kenny Cochran of Secret Arboretum introduced me to Korean or purple-bloom maple, *Acer pseudosieboldianum*, and I planted one in my backyard, I have been in wonder of its features. Fall foliage color, of course (more on that later), but years ago after the first years in our laissez-faire landscape, and with it almost making it look like I knew what I was doing, with its elegant form and overarching branches, I brought the gracious form up to horticulturist extraordinaire Ethan Johnson of Holden Arboretum.

Korean maple early season foliage (JC)



Withered viburnum. For our second plant feature, now that the election is over, here is something horticultural for you to vote upon: Should you plant *Viburnum nudum* and its cultivars such as ‘Winterthur’? This glossy-leaved native viburnum with tolerance to a range of soils and sun exposures is pleasing during spring and summer, but quite spectacular in the fall as leaves turn from green to orange and red and purple and in wonderful combination with fruits that turn from pink to blueberry-blue.



Viburnum nudum ‘Winterthur’ (JC)

Yet. From Cornell comes a list of viburnums and their relative susceptibility to feeding from the viburnum leaf beetle. This non-native invasive insect has become quite a pest in recent decades and is certainly here in northeast Ohio now.

In that publication (<http://www.hort.cornell.edu/vlb/suscept.html>), *Viburnum nudum* is listed in their category for:

“Highly susceptible species are the first to be attacked, and are generally destroyed in the first 2-3 years following infestation.”

To add to this, the highly knowledgeable Charles Tubesting, the Plant Collections Curator of Holden Arboretum notes:

*“We no longer have any *V. nudum* in our plant collection. Our policy is not to attempt to control chronic pests. We want to be able to display and recommend sustainable plant selections for gardens. We don't spray for VLB, which has meant that our viburnum collection has been reduced to the less susceptible taxa.. An interesting observation has been that, although *V. dentatum* {arrowwood viburnum} has been eliminated from plantings by VLB, plants growing at riparian edges have survived, though they do sustain foliage injury.”*

So, a recommendation for gardeners and landscapers relative to *Viburnum nudum* of **Do Not Plant** seems eminently reasonable, right?

Perhaps. To my mind, though, let us pause a moment to take a look at some caveats in the Cornell list:

“This is a preliminary list compiled by Dr. Paul Weston, Woody Plant Entomologist, Cornell University. It reflects our experiences so far. Just because a species is listed as most resistant doesn't mean that it won't be infested.”



Viburnum nudum ‘Winterthur’ (JC)

I do not doubt the list, but in addition to Cornell’s caveats, I want to suggest a very important general caveat relative to list utilization: **Do Not Always Take Lists To What Might Seem Their Logical Conclusions.** This is not to say that any given list is not relevant or even the ruling factor that we should use. It is not to say that *Viburnum nudum* is not highly susceptible. But, for example, does this list actually mean we should not plant *Viburnum nudum*?

Why do I say this? Let us listen to Paul Snyder, horticulturist at Secret Arboretum:

*“I haven’t observed any feeding on *V. nudum* at Secret. This year we had moderate infestations on *V. trilobum* and *V. dentatum* {also on Cornell’s highly susceptible list}, all planted in close proximity to *V. nudum*. Moreover, I haven’t observed any ovipositing on this year’s growth.”*



Viburnum nudum 'Winterthur' (JC)

This fits with my admittedly anecdotal observations over the past few years. Viburnum leaf beetle has been at Secrest for a number of years, but so has *V. nudum*. Additionally, at the Bent Ladder Cidery and Winery just several houses down the road from me in northern Wayne County, *V. nudum* is thriving and showing no damage. In fact the lead image in this alert is from there. Yet, in past years I have lost *Viburnum dentatum* in my yard to viburnum leaf beetle (though I was famously wrong, as Erik Draper has pointed out repeatedly, in my thinking early on that this insect was not really an actual killer).

So, what can be the cause of these disparities be? Here are a few thoughts:

1. Possibly VLB will eventually catch up with *V. nudum* at Secrest and everywhere else, and it just has not happened yet at these locations.
2. Maybe it is about population numbers. Perhaps there are just not enough VLB here.
3. Is it possible that once the first wave comes through and natural enemies emerge, a “highly susceptible species” may not be killed or heavily damaged – or be unworthy of its listing in a “preliminary list”?

Note above: a green stink bug nymph going all predatory on a viburnum leaf beetle at Secrest.

4. Maybe there is variability among *V. nudum* cultivars.

I think these are interesting questions relative to information utilization from lists. Maybe *V. nudum* is doomed and should not be planted, and it certainly at least deserves some reservations regarding its use, but I am not sure that this adaptable and beautiful native shrub should be cast out of our landscape designs. Perhaps I am channeling my inner Peter Smithers who said: “*I consider every plant hardy until I have killed it myself*”.