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December 27, 2014

A New Year For Trees

It is time now to start our new year - for trees. In the Jewish Arbor Day tradition, Tu Bishvat, the "New Year for Trees" celebration is early in the year. Last year it commenced at sunset on January 15, extending to nightfall in January 16 (this year it is February 3-4). So, let's usher in next weekend's new year - with trees. Ceremonial tree plantings common to Tu Bishvat in Israel are a little tough for wintry Ohio, but their idea of an ecological awareness day associated with trees is timeless.

One Tu Bishvat custom is eating a new fruit – try a medlar. Another is the eating of dried fruits and almonds or to eat a dish made from the Seven Species abundant in areas of the Middle East: barley, wheat (skip this if gluten-free), figs, pomegranates, dates, and a light dressing of olive oil, perhaps in a pilaf, washed down with a grape-based beverage.

At OSU's Secrest Arboretum at the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center in Wooster, our new year of trees follows the retirement of Kenny Cochran as the Arboretum's Director, with friend and fellow tree-steward Joe Cochran taking on the interim Director role. Join us all this Spring for a planting of a grove of umbrella magnolias (*Magnolia tripetala*) in honor of Kenny Cochran's love of trees. A grove of this large-leaved magnolia was one of Kenny's favorite spots before large oaks crashed down on them four years ago from tornadic winds roaring over their Rhododendron Valley home. Yet, yet, as the Lorax might say, the resonant centerpiece of the new grove will be young trees grown from the magnolia seedpods collected from fallen trees that September day after the tornado.

For now, taking our cue from trees of seasons past, here is a pictorial inspiration for your New Year of Trees. First, a reminder of the environmental services trees provide, courtesy of the i-Tree (U.S. Forest Service, Davey Tree Expert Co., International Society of Arboriculture, Arbor Day Foundation) models for the ecological audits of trees (stormwater remediation, energy savings, air quality benefits, carbon sequestration, and enhanced property values).

For example, for the urban forest of Fox Valley Wisconsin, the trees provide \$4.89 million of benefits annually, estimated at a 300% return on investment. For example, our OSU i-Tree estimates for Ohio cities of varied sizes indicate annual benefits for the street trees of Toledo (\$15.1 million), Dublin (\$965,000), and Bucyrus (\$354,000). For example, the 362 towering oaks of the College of Wooster campus provide over \$61,000 in annual benefits to the city of Wooster. For example, a single 31" diameter river birch tree on the OSU Columbus campus provides over \$263 in annual benefits and a 30" diameter pin oak in the Chatscape logs in (woodman – do not cut that tree!) at over \$371.

Just check it out for your own urban or suburban tree or forest at treebenefits.com.

So, sally forth, right now, check out the tell-tale bark of a lacebark pine at one of Ohio's fine arboreta. On or around Tu Bishvat, wonder at the presence of vermilion-colored flowers, albeit tiny ones, on the filberts or the fluffy yellow pollen of alders at Secrest Arboretum. Check out, if there is some snow, the snow patterns of beech

trunks at Johnson Woods Nature Preserve near Orrville. Come spring, join us for Arbor Day at the Miller Pavilion at Secrest and rejoice with Robert Frost in “*Tree at my window, window tree, / My sash is lowered when night comes on; / But let there never be curtain drawn / Between you and me.*”

Catch the emergence of buckeyes in Ohio forests and stroll through Elm Allee at New York’s Central Park.

Come summer smell and see and touch the frilly petals of white fringetree and do what Kenny Cochran even in his retirement will surely be doing: conducting a Kenventory of trees and other plants at his favorite treelands. Then bring the New Year of Trees home next fall with the Autumn foliage show of color for trees such as sweet birch, the late flowering of franklinia, and the maturing of another year of trees with the bottlebrush buckeye fruits

To close out this year, here is a little poem for Kenny:

Children in the woods, dawnredwoods rising tall

Sharing of the light, growing, learning call

Making new plants, forward ever on and on

Beauty living, sharing greening - his gift a gift for all