

Plant Lover's Almanac

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Once again this year we are having a real winter, fortunately here in northeast Ohio not quite as real as New England, but beautiful with snowy scenes. With this new year of snow and our new year of trees, we have started a new blog for the Secrest Arboretum at Ohio State University's Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center in Wooster. Over time we will open up ASecrestJournal.blogspot.com for contributors, but for today in this Almanac and on the web you can follow the usual suspects: Secrest Director Joe Cochran, Wooster Book Company's David Wiesenberg, and your resident Almaniatic. Here are a few early posts: follow us and images anon of a winter Secrest.

January 1, 2015. (from Chatfield). Sun, wind, blue-sky, temperature – 32F. Midday of the New Year of Trees at Secrest Arboretum and the beginning of this journal. Winterberry holly berries are bright red and sherbet-orange. mushrooms glisten on oak stump. Shadows lengthen from the Dawnredwood Grove. Witch hazel flowers are still tight of bud. Feature for today is bark: paperbark maple, river birch, stewartia; winter shine. I call Ken Cochran from Secrest on his first day as amateur curator.

January 4, 2015 (from Wiesenberg). It's never too early to anticipate spring. I went over to the Arboretum today to look over the stand of black and sugar maple trees in compartments D2 and D4 which I tap for sap and of course took a general look and walk around. Last fall, I started looking for witch hazels in bloom as a graduate student in entomology was hoping to gather its pollen to fill in a database. In mid-October of last year, I noticed that a few small witch hazel plants (*Hamamelis virginiana*) were blooming along the blacktop path by the slide and play area. I sent my friend a note of head's up.

In any event, witch hazel was on my mind this winter and I saw a few blooms right at the base of a different species of witch hazel (*H. vernalis*) along the path between the entrance pavilion and the Nault pond on Christmas day. Now, more have sprung. Now my goal will be to see one of the woody capsules catapult its seeds. As a post script, I might mention that many of the witch hazels that are sold commercially are often hybrid crosses with Asian species. The one in our backyard, for example, doesn't look typical of either *H. virginiana* or *H. vernalis*.

January 7, 2015. From Joe Cochran, comes this poem, celebrating winter in verse and vision, from hollies to blue jays, from variegated pines to the snow-laden arching branches of larch.:

*Pristine snow, winds that blow, fruits for all to see.
Mercury falling, blue jays calling, no better place to be.
A Dragon's eye, a clear blue sky, rabbits on the run
Larches weeping, Pieris peeping, and clouds that mask the sun
Bark is peeling, oh what a feeling, to be a part of this
There's so much here, and not a fear, it's only Ken I miss.*

You get the picture, check it out as the seasons progress. And check out the other glories of winter, however far afield. Now and then you just need to get out of the cold and visit botanical conservatories to see such sights as the cyclamen at Detroit's Belle Isle. In New York City last week there were for many winter wonders including

polar bears (in the American Museum of Natural History's realistic dioramas), or at the Big Apple's High Line Park with views of birches, witch hazels, pieris and sumac. Finally, in only-in-New York fashion, there were sushi displays at the Amish Market. If Amish sushi can make it in New York it can make it anywhere!