

Plant Lover's Almanac

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It's a most wonderful time of the year. The finery of Nature is on display, from the almost prehistoric look of buckeye leaves emerging to tiny unfurling beech leaves in flight. Pawpaw flowers are popping, robin redbreasts are nesting and dogwoods, striped maples, and larches are aleafing – oh my! Take advantage of this once-a-year window to participate in the awakening.

Which brings us to BYGL, the Buckeye Yard and Garden Line that is, Ohio State University Extension's timely electronic newsletter that is now completing its first month of the year. Every Tuesday OSU Extensioners chat on the phone about emerging landscape and natural area plants and their problems and then the BYGL is written and sent out each Thursday, a timely reminder of garden creativity, chores and crises. Check it out at bygl.osu.edu. Here are a few recent entries.

Large flowered trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*). Pam Bennett of OSU Extension in Clark County selected this plant as her perennial of the week last week in honor of its glorious bloom showing off then in Clifton Gorge Nature Preserve. It is coming into prominence now in northeast Ohio, for example in the Summit County MetroParks and at Johnson Woods Nature Preserve near Orrville. Dubbed Ohio's official state wildflower in 1986, large-flowered trillium at one time was found in every county in the state. The 3-petaled flowers are held erectly atop a 1/2' - 1' stem, right above the 3 leaves. If you look down on a plant from the top, you will see the 3-petaled flower surrounded by 3 sepals, on top of 3 leaves. They thrive in fertile woodland soils and bloom in the early spring.

Pam's reminder to all who enjoy our woodland flowers - DO NOT DIG THEM AND TAKE THEM HOME! First of all, spring ephemerals dug at this time don't usually survive transplanting; more importantly, if everyone did this, we wouldn't have anything left to enjoy in our natural areas. *Trillium* can be purchased in pots or bare-root in garden centers and can be planted now. Ohio is blessed with incredible natural areas and BYGLers encourage you to get out and enjoy them during the spring wildflower season. For a list of nature preserves and to find the one nearest you, go to: [<http://naturepreserves.ohiodnr.gov/>]

Heavy maple seed production. Joe Boggs of OSU Extension in Hamilton County rang the bell further south with reports of heavy maple seed (a.k.a. helicopter seed, maple spinners,) production and we are beginning to note the same up north. Abundant winged maple seeds (samaras) in the spring draw both the attention and wrath of landscapers and homeowners. Trees shift energy to support heavy seed production at the expense of leaf expansion which makes "seedy trees" look unhealthy. The overall sickly appearance is enhanced once seeds mature and turn brown. Of course, once the seeds drop, the resulting maple seedlings become a serious weed issue as they sprout throughout landscapes and in uncovered building gutters.

It was once believed that prolific maple seed production is connected to tree stress; the theory was that heavy seed production occurred on stressed or dying trees as a last hurrah in support of the species. It was eventually discovered that maples are by nature heavy seed producers; however, the successful persistence of the seed to maturity depends upon whether or not the flowers or nascent seed is exposed to freezing temperatures. Much of Ohio had moderate temperatures throughout bloom and early seed development on red, silver, and sugar maples. Consequently, these maples are heavy with seed. Before too many years those helicopters shall themselves be parents! Life goes on.

Pine wilt disease. Nancy Taylor of OSU's Plant and Pest Diagnostic Clinic in Reynoldsburg noted we need to increase awareness of this problem. So I wrote about it in a recent BYGL. This disease involves the microscopic-sized pine wood nematode (*Bursaphelenchus xylophilus*), which is transmitted to 2-needled pines by pine sawyer insects (*Monochamus* species). It is primarily a pathogen of exotic pines (e.g. Scots pine and Austrian pine) rather than native pines such as white pine. Unlike many plant parasitic nematodes that cause plant diseases on roots, this nematode, after being vectored by the sawyer insects that feed on pine stems, damages plants by feeding on cells of the vascular (conducting) system of the plant, ultimately causing rapid (weeks or months) decline of the pine.

Tree death often progresses from the top of the pine downward, unlike most needle diseases that thrive on lower branches where higher relative humidity and moisture conditions prevail on the outer portions of the plants. The nematodes, once introduced under the bark by the pine sawyers, feed on wood stain fungi and on the plant cells, resulting in first grayish needle discoloration and then browning of needles on branches and the entire plant in short order. Needles are retained for some time on the plant, which is also different than many other pine diseases.

Stress plays a role in the extent of the problem and pine wilt disease also does not tend to occur on pines younger than 10 years old. Control is difficult and relies on proper diagnosis and then removal and disposal of affected trees. Though the sawyers spread the nematode to living trees, starting the disease cycle, the insects also may lay eggs on dying and dead trees in a planting, with these trees acting as reservoirs for the vector and the pathogen which then attack living trees. So if diagnosis is confirmed, removal of affected, dying and dead trees in the planting is needed. Send inch thick or larger stem tissue for microscopic examination for nematodes to the C. Wayne Ellet Plant and Pest Diagnostic Clinic [<http://ppdc.osu.edu>] if you see rapid dying of pines and suspect pine wilt disease.

Mowing matters. Curtis Young of OSU Extension's Van Wert County reminded us all of what I am sure is everyone's favorite spring activity by penning "MOW, MOW, AND MOW SOME MORE!" Proper mowing is the most important maintenance practice performed on established lawns, sport fields, golf courses, and other turf areas. Properly mowed lawns are denser, have fewer weeds, are more moisture-stress tolerant, and are of a higher quality than lawns that are not. A general rule is - a properly mowed lawn should look as good or better after it is mowed, than before it was mowed! If it does not, then some aspect(s) of the mowing procedure was not done properly.

Rapid turf growth in the spring makes quality mowing a daunting challenge! Remember the basics of mowing: a) mow high; b) mow frequently; and c) mow with a sharp blade. For more information refer to the OSU Extension Fact Sheet HYG-4020-93: Lawn Mowing ([<http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/4000/4020.html>]).

- Mow high, 2 1/2" - 3". Three inches is often the highest setting on the mower, if it is height adjustable.
- Mow frequently. In the spring with very rapid growth this may mean mowing two times a week.
- Each mowing should remove 1/3 or less of the height of the grass. If the grass is allowed to grow too tall, mowing will remove too much of the blades of the grass resulting in a "stemmy" appearance and poor color. Continual removal of more than 1/3 results in a stressed root system going into the heat of summer.
- Return clippings to the lawn whenever possible. This recycles nutrients and reduces yard waste. Some suggestions to deal with excessive clippings include: double cutting the lawn to cut the clippings finer so

they can move down into the turf canopy, and mow higher and more frequently, however if there is a thick mat of clippings removal is recommended. Put these clippings in the compost pile.

- Remember to sharpen the mower blade. A dull mower blade tears and shreds the ends of the grass blades. As the shredded ends of the grass blades dry, they turn tan to brown in color. A sharp blade produces a clean cut that limits the amount of browning that occurs.

Well, you get the picture. *To close:* BYGL even has a touch of the lyrical. Last week, I talked about tuliptree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), a native tree with a Chinese cousin and a long history in the fossil record. Tuliptrees are the largest true flowering plants in the eastern United States, champions almost approaching 200 feet in the Great Smoky Mountains. Their saucer-like blossoms sport yellows, greens, and orange, their leaves are shaped like tulips. They are in the magnolia family, they thrive in fertile, microbe-rich organic soils. Their name, though, trills like no other...

Leeree-oh-den-dron too-lip-if-er-ahh, trippingly on the tongue

Liltingly, nimbly a dance across Nature's green stage, a dream to be

An Asian cousin, others 70, 80 million years old

Today we may plant anew, a giant someday to accrue

Leaves of tulips, blooming in the sun

Flowers of tepals, petals yellow-green, daubed with orange

Relatives magnolias blooming now in all their glory

Tulipwood trunks growing up, above the maples above the oaks

Canopy giants nurtured in forest soil of fauna and flora

Microbial glue binding and flowing freely

*Leer-ee-oh den-dron too-lip-if-er-**ahhhhh!***