

Plant Lovers Almanac

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If snowdrops are struggling to emerge, how would we know – with all this snow? It is hard to imagine that winter is only three weeks old, but we were due a reality check reminder of a bracingly cold northeast Ohio winter. Today's antidote? A short discussion of an indoor pursuit: some edible landscape aspects of recent holiday feasts – and to close, our latest Name That Plant contest for all you Almaniacs.

Plants In the Kitchen. One of the joys of last year's OSU Secrest Arboretum Autumn programming was our first ever Edible Landscape ArborEatUm program. One of the offerings was black chokeberry jam, made from this excellent fall foliage and fruit favorite, *Aronia melanocarpa* 'Viking'. For Christmas, Paul Snyder of OSU made some wonderful Viking sugar drop cookies, which also included a touch of almond, *Prunus amygdalus*. A great new tradition. Another holdover from the ArborEatUm program also provided some extra cheer to holiday dinners. It was an ice cold aperitif of crème de cassis which OSU Master Gardener volunteer Lois Rose had gifted us. Absolutely wonderful to accent a Chatfield New Year's Feast. Deeply fruity.

Winterberry holly (*Ilex verticillata* and its hybrids) sprigs of bright red graced holiday tables as well, though these we of course did not eat. Rosemary sprigs found their way into a new ham salad recipe from tasteologie.com. Ohio maple syrup was used to glaze bacon, Dolgo crabapple butter was a wonderful condiment for holiday turkey as well as for pork tenderloin. Grape arbors can also be a lovely landscape feature, and surely served well for matching that pork tenderloin and apples with an excellent Traminette wine a la winemaker neighbor Matt Vradoska of Rittman Orchards. Traminette is a delightful hybrid grape that combines a cross between a French American hybrid grape and a Grewurtztraminer grape. The landscape is truly alive with the tastes and aromas for all the holidays of the year.

Now for the contests.

The Last Name That Plant Winner. The two conifers in the last contest were: Carolina hemlock (*Tsuga caroliniana*) and a two-needled pine, probably Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), so the correct answer to what two genera pictured was – *Tsuga* and *Pinus*. My devious trick was to show the hemlock twig with its tiny, singly-attached flat needles with a bundle of needles from a two-needled pine caught up in the twig, fallen from the pine tree that over-towered the hemlock. How could someone know it was a pine? That is the lesson: pines, are unique among the conifers (trees with cones and needles) in that the needles are not singly-attached, but rather come in bundles of two, three and five, depending upon the species.

Visual and written clues for the hemlock included the fact that the needles were flat, and that this tree was endangered by an invasive woolly adelgid insect in Ohio, in this case, the hemlock woolly adelgid. How could enquiring readers tell that the tree with flat, singly-attached needles were hemlocks rather than firs (also with flat, singly-attached needles) from the picture and description? The key was the fact that hemlocks were not described as a Christmas tree, but firs, such as Canaan and Fraser firs, are wonderful Christmas trees. So, tricky but hopefully all this increases your conifer identification skills. If you remember one thing to pass on to your children or parents it is this: pines have needles in bundles of two, three or five, and other conifers do not.

The winner of the contest was, drum roll please...Sarah Vradenburg of Akron, who will receive her copy of *A Sand County Almanac*.

The New Name That Plant Contest. Now for this week's contest.

The pictured two tiers of trees at Sequest Arboretum stand out all through the year, perhaps most noticeably in spring with their soft, green, emergent, new leaves. Summer foliage is a darker green, fall color for one species is golden, the other red-brown. Both trees are conifers, with needles and cones, but are deciduous, with fall color and eventual leaf drop. Both are in the Cupressaceae, the cypress family, along with juniper and arborvitae. Name the common and Latin names of these two trees, quite prominent at OSU's Sequest Arboretum in Wooster and planted at many other locations in Ohio, including here in northeast Ohio. Contact me at chatfield.1@osu.edu or text to 330-466-0270, and if you are the first with both trees correctly identified, you will receive a book as a prize.

To close, once snow melts, look groundward, as well as upward. During the last week of December I enjoyed forest floor fallen leaf cover en masse at Johnson Woods Nature Preserve near Orrville, but also the patterns of individual leaves and fruits fallen on the boardwalk. Celebrate each season and celebrate the great joy of horticulture and botany in all its Marvels. Not the excellent comic and action versions, but as in Andrew Marvell, the 17th century poet and politician (where are such now?) who penned:

*What wond'rous life is that I lead!
Ripe apples drop about my head;
The luscious clusters of the vine
Upon my mouth do crush their wine;
The nectarine and curious peach,
Into my hands themselves do reach;
Stumbling on melons, as I pass,
Insnar'd with flow'rs, I fall on grass.*