

## Plant Lovers Almanac

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In the kitchen window, in a jar of water, is a single shoot of forsythia. Cut two weeks ago from a bush in the side yard, there are now swollen buds and some leaves that have emerged, a light green. Each day more green is evident. Oh, yes, there is also a lemon yellow flower, with its four pinwheel petals. A harbinger of spring to come. Alas, though, only a single flower. Why only a single flower? Is this floral sparseness also a harbinger for the spring of 2014?

News flash: Not, or at least not necessarily. That is the problem with prognosticating the next season. We do not know if this lone flower means that forsythia will be lush or if it will be lonely with flowering come springtime. It is certainly suggestive that many of the flower buds of forsythia were blasted on this shoot by sub-zero temperatures in January. For most of those freezing events there was not enough sheltering snow to protect buds. Maybe, though, this single windowed shoot was an anomaly and forsythia will still shine throughout much of the plant come spring.

The same uncertainty is true of other hopes for a winter-wonderized spring: will emerald ash borer larvae inside ash tree trunks succumb to the cold this winter? There is some research to show that extreme cold will reduce numbers, but the outer bark is quite a protectant and extreme cold typically must persist for longer periods than we experienced even here in northeast Ohio this year. So it goes with predicting the effects of cold winter temperatures. Sometimes a particular insect will not survive as well as normal, but then its natural predators also falter, and the end result is equilibrium.

We do expect bagworms will not survive as well since winter cold can limit them and we have seen a definite increase in bagworms further north in Ohio over the past several decades, a veritable example of “global worming”. We laugh, but the world “global” should remind us of caution. The evidence of global warming is very clear, but not on a daily, weekly, monthly, or even annual basis (given the vagaries of complex weather cycles), and certainly not for any given region of the globe. Globally temperatures are clearly warming, but as we have seen, for any given day in any given area such as northeast Ohio in any given year, our pinkies are still colder than we can ever remember.

And, from the soft winter half-foot snow for our walk at Furnace Run Metro Park Serving Summit County with the Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalists exactly two weeks ago for a different half-foot of snow at the International Ice Sculptures championships in Breckenridge Colorado during a forest entomology research meeting a few days later, I declare – this is an old-fashioned winter!

**The Last Name That Plant Contest.** And the winner is, Jo Ernst, who texted her entry around breakfast time two Saturdays ago. She correctly identified the two genera as *Hamamelis* (witch hazel) and *Fothergilla*. They are lovely plants both with fothergilla blooming come spring and some witch hazels blooming now – outside. Come on – right now? Indeed we saw some peeks during this past week’s warm spell.

But still you question - blooming right now? Yes, indeed, and this is not even early. In the January 19 *Almanac* last year, we noted witch hazels, with their “ribbon-like flower petals” of yellow, orange, and red “crinkling up and expanding” depending on the daily temperatures. Enjoy this early reminder that spring will truly come. The witch hazels that flower now are mostly hybrids and Asian species. Our native witch hazel *Hamamelis vernalis* typically blooms a little later and is around a little longer. For example, in the March 21, 2009 *Almanac* we noted that the newly sprung season included “luxuriant bloom” of fragrant witch hazel flowers.

As for fothergilla, its bloom was noted in the May 16, 2009 *Almanac*, so it is a mid-spring bloomer. Dwarf fothergilla (*Fothergilla gardenii*) is a small shrub (3-5 foot) with unusual bottlebrush-like 1-2 inch frilly white fragrant flowers blooming before or as foliage emerges. Attractive foliage that is dark green in summer and turns combination of yellows, oranges and reds in fall. ‘Mt. Airy’ is one of many dwarf fothergilla cultivars with excellent flower and fall foliage features. Plant in moist, acid well-drained soils.

**The New Name That Plant Contest.** It was difficult to choose our new challenge this week. Should it be one of the evergreens that now show their needles in bundles of 2, 3, or 5 (pine) or singly-attached, such as fir, spruce, hemlock, yew? Should it be a native tree with corsage-like clusters of florets emanating straight from the stem (a feature known as cauliflory). Nahh, Should it be a spring flowering and fall fruiting shrub with aromatic scratch-and-sniff twig characteristics that is a welcome introduction to seasons to come. Why, yes. Check out the Name That Plant pictures today, and if you think you have it, contact me at [chatfield.1@osu.edu](mailto:chatfield.1@osu.edu) or text to 330-466-0270. If you are the first with common name and Latin genus and species name you will receive a book as a prize. This time, once again, it will be *Seeing Flowers: Discover the Hidden Life of Flowers* by Robert Llewellyn and Teri Dunn Chace.

To close, here is something I came across in a quite interesting book about the gift of art this past weekend:

“Even if we have paid a fee at the door of the museum or concert hall, when we are touched by a work of art something comes to us which has nothing to do with the price. I went to see a landscape painter’s works, and that evening, walking among pine trees near my home, I could see the shapes and colors I had not seen the day before.” – Lewis Hyde, from *The Gift; Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*