

## Plant Lovers Almanac

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So much happening in the plant world, yet there is only so much space for this Almanac. I originally planned to write about a mélange of maples, to write about the only time of year to notice the emerging of hickory leaves, of new pawpaw flowers, of dogwood, maple, and maackia, oh my! What has risen to the surface instead, though, is a series of excellent questions posed by attendees at Plant Discovery Day at OSU's Sequest Arboretum this past Saturday. Inquiring minds wanted to know, so here are a few answers.

Q. We have a blue spruce that is just not as blue as we would like it to be? What can we do?

A. The needles of Colorado spruce (*Picea pungens*) grown from seed may range in color from green to intensely bluish in tone. The color is due to the configuration of wax filaments on the needles and the light that is then reflected. Seeds of course are the products of two sets of chromosomes (the female and male parents) and so, like you and your siblings, there is variability. This is why some Colorado spruces are blue, and others various shades from green to blue. There is nothing to do about the one you have, but to grow your landscape garden, purchase a 'Candicans' cultivar of white fir (*Abies concolor* 'Candicans'), another type of evergreen, and this cultivar is asexually propagated, with each clone identical – and with intensely glaucous reliably blue-white needles.

Q. – I want to plant some crabapples on my property. I have a somewhat wild area where the goats do roam and also a more refined landscape area. Which crabapple should I plant?

A. – This question was posed by OSU plant breeder David Francis and of course, my answer was to plant many crabapples. For Goatlandia I recommended a few 'Dolgo' crabapples. There are cyanogenic glycoside toxins in the seeds of apples and crabapples, so it would not be good for the goats to have an exclusive crabapple diet. 'Dolgo' is a larger crabapple (but not too large, if fruits exceed 2 inches in diameter then it is an apple instead of a crabapple) which the goats might enjoy, and if you harvest them ahead of the goats, there is always Mike Lee's nearly World Famous Dolgo Crabapple Butter to blow your College of Food ever-lovin' mind.

The recipe: Start with 8 lbs of crabapples. Wash in a large kettle and cover with water. Heat to a boil. Simmer until fruit softens. Drain, then process through a mill. To the sauce add 3 lb of sugar, two quarts of cider, one tablespoon of cinnamon and a teaspoon of cloves. Simmer under low heat or use a large crock pot for 2-4 hours. Stir occasionally. As Mike notes, the house will then smell great. Pour off hot Dolgo butter into jars. Process in a hot water bath or freeze.

Note: My wife Laura's Dolgo butter once defeated nurseryman Mike's version in a tasteoff in Oregon's Willamette Valley. Her secret – go easy on the sugar and boiling time. Her version is a ruby red color rather than the usual dark apple butter look and considerably tarter than Mike's version. Harvest Dolgo in early September.

As for the landscape area, plant a sequence of coral-red blooming rounded form 'Prairifire' crabapples alternating with shimmering white-flowered upright form 'Adirondack' crabapples for a wonderful display. Be careful that cars do not screech to a halt to view the spectacle.

Q. - Jim., what is so great about paperbark maple?

A. – Secret Arboretum curator Kenny Cochran asked me to come up to the auction stage at Plant Discovery Day when a lovely specimen of paperbark maple, *Acer greseum*, was being introduced. My answer: the cinnamon-colored peeling bark of this maple is unparalleled for its contrast with a blue-sky day in the winterscape, especially if there is snow on the ground and caught up in the branches. Very elegant.

Q. - Deer are eating the lower portions of my arborvitae. Is there another evergreen that looks similar you might suggest?

A. - There are no guarantees when it comes to these four-legged foragers, considering such variables as how hungry are the deer, what alternative food sources are available, and how well your local environment supports the deer numbers, and all that, but many people note less deer feeding on falsecypress (*Chamaecyparis*). Plantsman and nurseryman extraordinaire Bill Hendricks from Lake County names falsecypress as his favorite evergreen, especially along water features in a landscape. Secret Arboretum plantsman extraordinaire Paul Snyder also notes that where arborvitae are chewed by deer, nearby falsecypress are eschewed. That's good enough for me.

**Name That Plant Contests.** There were two early-bird winners for the May 3 contest: Fred Fricker and Shane Lowrey. They correctly identified the Mystery Plant as sassafras, a lovely native tree with currently-blooming and oft-overlooked chartreuse flowers.

The new contest is a common tree which fairly recently flowered. It has unusual leaves compared to its cousins, but its fruits-to-come are very familiar. Name That Plant!

Remember, Shakespeare wrote: "In Nature's infinite book of secrecy a little I can read". So, the winner's prize (first to text or e-mail me at chatfield.1@osu.edu) shall be a nature book – I am pondering the selection for this round. Some contestants who are correct but not first to be correct lament that they do not get their paper until after 7:00. Remember though, the article is on ohio.com

Oh, and one last question...

Q. – Can I plant Japanese maples in the sun?

A. – My standard answer is no, but the questioner then noted that she wanted to plant a second Japanese maple as a companion to a mature 'Bloodgood' Japanese maple in a full sun exposure in her landscape. Well, sometimes plants do not read the book, so who am I to say? After all Perer Smithers quipped in a similar vein: "I consider every plant hardy until I have killed it myself" Still, I recommended that if she plants another Japanese maple, make sure she provides cooling soil conditions (2-3 inches of organic mulch), as often Japanese maples develop leaf scorch during hot summer days due to losing more water from leaves than can be taken up through the roots.

There, I managed to write about maples a little bit, anyway. So to close:

*I drove to Westenbirt, the arboretum in Gloucestershire, one misty morning in October, 1994. The parkland was full of parked cars. 'Is there a pop concert or car rally?', I asked with dismay. 'No, they've come here like you – to see the maples.'* – Thomas Parkenham, from *Meetings With Remarkable Trees*