

Plant Lover's Almanac

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They say that all politics and all gardening is local, but if you are not an Ohioan you have to wonder about the politics part. As the ultimate swing state we've been courted this past decade far more than other localities, and now the RNC arrives. Oh, well, at least we have the pleasure of watching a wonderful series of TV ads through November! As to gardening it really is local to each gardener, and I have decided to focus on the ChatScape for this Almanac edition.

Wildlife. We live in the country, near Doylestown and with the Rittman Orchard coming up to our back yard. This is wonderful relative to that most wondrous of harvest seasons – berry time, but the living in the country part is also quite interesting. Coyotes provide their weird series of moans, whistles, yips, and howls – truly cool. And, equally cool we have a mother turkey and two turkettes that waltz through our yard periodically this summer. This is much to our delight, except for areas of the lawn (such as it is with our dry period this summer) that they ruffle up, presumably in their omnivorous belief that “We Have The Meat” (insects and millipedes) and vegetables (acorns, roots, almost everything else).



Wild turkey with young turkette during the day (JC)



Wild turkey mother settles in for the night high up in silver maple (JC)

Then at dusk this Wednesday cousin Nicola, visiting from Portland for my daughter Anna's wedding, noticed that the turkeys were hanging out in the large silver maple tree in our front yard. Maybe 50 feet up in the maple tree! Perhaps everyone else in the world knew this save me, but I had no idea that turkeys have arrived at the obviously successful evolutionary gambit of sleeping the night away safely up trees above their predators. I seem to remember that when encountering wild turkeys in the woods they frantically

bulldozed their way through the brush. It never occurred to me that they are powerfully fast fliers as well as track-star sprinters on the ground.

Now I am a true turkey – enthusiast.



One more turkey pic, So cool! (JC)

Quercus, Which Art Thou? Maybe about 15 years ago, Kenny Cochran, then curator of Secrest Arboretum, sold me a small oak that my wife and I planted in the back yard. It suffered mightily from wildlife damage for years, with deer annually ravaging the trunk and breaking the branches. In the past few years it has prevailed in this struggle and has become a beautiful tree. One problem: I just could not quite remember what oak Kenny said

it was (and thankfully, is). I thought he said Turkish oak and made a few lame attempts to ask others what they knew about Turkish oaks. Blank stares.



Turkey oak foliage and developing acorn (JC)

Since it survived and now thrives, I finally decided to find out its true identity. Especially after I noticed acorns for the first time this year. Neat scraggly, hairy-cupped acorns. Sort of like tiny bur-oak or overcup-oak acorns. I knew it was in the white oak group since the leaves have rounded lobes instead of leaf lobes with bristle hairs in the red/black oak group of oaks. So, and you probably saw this coming, as I looked into this a little I discovered it is not a Turkish oak, but almost: it is a Turkey oak (*Quercus cerris*) that originated in eastern Europe/Asia Minor including Turkey not to be confused with the American turkey oak (*Quercus laevis*), which is in the red oak group and is named for leaves that look like a turkey foot.

Now that the deer and possibly turkeys (they can do a lot of damage in the landscape) are presumably done with this 15-foot tall tree, it is free to soar to its potential of 80-130 feet with six-foot diameter trunks. Not for a while, and a lot longer than this turkey will be around.

O Rose Thou Art Sick. Or How Not To Prune A Rose. With apologies to William Blake and his 1794 publication of the deep-meaning “The Sick Rose” poem, it occurred to me recently that my wife’s weekly mowing over a multiflora rose that had popped up in our back field was continually chopping off the terminal shoot of this rose, above the apical meristem of new growth. This results in a tufted look to the surviving above-ground parts of the rose. In our case, I see this mowing as a metaphor for topping, a typically thoughtless pruning technique that results in trees that then shoot up new, weak growth. For trees, top not, you clod-loppers: it releases adjacent buds resulting in hormonal imbalance and this tufted, weak growth. Instead of indiscriminate topping, make targeted pruning cuts just above a bud.



Rose tufting due to repeated mowings (JC)

Maplemania. For years, we have enjoyed the many maples that grow in our yard along with our children, and all the visiting children (and adults) arriving for the wedding. There are large silver maples growing too close to the house, snakebark and striped maples overhanging the



Fall color on Korean maple (JC)



Hedge maple shape (JC)

picnic table in back, favorite specialty maples such as three-flowered maple and Korean maple, the perfectly shaped hedge maple near the garden, my favorite puzzler for plant ID quizzes for landscapers – the hornbeam maple, and the newest addition: a variegated box elder maple (*Acer negundo* ‘Flamingo’). I identify with the sentiment expressed by Thomas Pakenham’s quote in “Meetings with Remarkable Trees”:



Hornbeam maple leaves, flowers, and fruits (JC)



'Flamingo' boxelder maple (JC)

“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.”

But speaking of those magical berries! Off to Rittman Orchard, for red raspberries; oh, my brother David’s favorite fresh berry, my sister Sally’s fresh red raspberry tart, and my beloved Aunt Pam’s favorite red raspberry jam. For orchard blueberries now coming in to ripeness. In the ChatScape are highbush blueberry bushes that we have not killed off yet 30 years after moving in here from the previous owner’s inherited garden, but nothing



Black raspberry harvest of Laura Chatfield (JC)

measures up to my brother Bill’s wife Jane’s fresh whole-blueberry pie. But, I too have an absolute favorite berry, even outpacing to me these others now on the scene and the just past strawberries. Not the Pacific



Blueberries from Chatscape (JC)

Northwest blackberries favored by our Oregon and Washington relatives. For me, just now ending their reign in our back yard: it is the black raspberry. The sweet and woody taste of Earth itself.



Black raspberry harvest (JC)