

Plant Lover's Almanac

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For: June 18, 2016

Throughout northeast Ohio, thunderstorms drop raindrops on some heads and not others and the chirping cacophony of cicadas ebbs and flows depending upon geography. But strawberries! For a year we have waited for fresh fruits such as these. Pick and buy them now, and just this week the season of red raspberries is upon us. The year of the berries has begun.

Monday brings us summer, and the living shall be easy, especially if you want to receive your gardening and plant health management information with the flick of a cell-phoned finger. For years, I have harangued you about the benefits of OSU's Buckeye Yard and Garden Line (BYGL) newsletter of timely, user-friendly items about landscapes, gardens, and all plant-loving matters. This year the BYGL electronic newsletter has become more blog-like, and you can receive updates on your cellphone through your e-mail address, any time of day, any time of year. Wake up to the smell of roses via your BYGL alerts!

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Simple as that. Then learn about cicadas and sourgums and maples, oh my!

Cicada Geography. If you look at a map of the emergence of Brood V of the 17-year cicadas, *Magicicada septendecim* (what a great name!), for example at www.cicadamania.com, it looks like almost the entire eastern half of Ohio was destined for the same experience. As we know by now, though, it is not one size fits all. Go to the OSU Mansfield Campus and the cacophony is big-time, go to Wooster and it is late spring quietude, until dog-day cicadas, which we hear every year arriving later in the summer. Twenty miles south at Mohican State Park and the male cicadas choir is signing away. Ashley Kulhanek of OSU-Medina County reports that some parts of the county have these noise-makers, others do not.



Cicada female and oviposition slits in maple twig (JC)

If you drive to southeast Ohio, you will find that even with closed windows and the radio on there is a pitch of a different tune. My wife Laura and I drove and hiked that way last weekend, and in addition to the sound from the male cicada's abdominal tymbals and echo chamber, there is also quite a series of sights: of cast cicada skins, of emergence holes and areas of predator feeding on the ground, of flying adults bumping into windshields and buzzing from trees, and of females ovipositing (laying eggs) in twigs. The female cicada uses its sharp abdominal ovipositor to slit those twigs, laying eggs that hatch, followed by nymphs making their way back into the soil to casually feed on roots for the next 17 years before emerging again.



Twig flagging and oviposition slits on tuliptree twig (JC)

Damage to the plant roots is not considered significant. The adults feed on sugary sap in the plant stem's xylem, and twigs effectively damaged by the oviposition slits generally are no worry relative to plant health, though tell that to a nurseryman or fruit tree grower and they rail against losing a year's growth, quite important if other competing nurseries are not affected. Context is everything. At least in the human-ish short-term, for the most part cicadas stay put and the different periodical cicada broods are consistent in location from cycle to cycle. Geography is destiny; cicadas do not fly too far afield and if one does it risks not finding a mate to start the reproductive process anew.

Cicadas will soon put this emergence behind them and singing will stop within a few weeks, but in affected areas you will soon see the twig dieback as the oviposition-damaged conducting system of the twigs results in discolored and wilted leaves and twig death outward from the slitted twigs. This soon shall pass and stem damage will not be noticeable after a few years, but cicadas shall remain with us, sight unseen underground.

And, seemingly ever anon and anon. Cicadas are mentioned in the records of China's Shang Dynasty (approximately 1600-1146 BC) and are noted in Homer's *Iliad* as Priam and others at the Scaean Gates:

*"They sat there, on the tower, these Trojan elders,
like cicadas perched up on a forest branch, chirping
their soft, delicate sounds."*

Not so old, really, relative to cicadas, as they are found in the fossil record all the way back in the Permian period, some 250-300 million years ago.

Maple Anthracnose. Leaf and twig diseases from anthracnose fungi are common every spring, with the fungi infecting leaves during earlier cool, wet weather during leaf emergence – a bit hard to remember with heat and dryness now. Sycamore anthracnose is often most noted, as trees look barren from sycamore anthracnose in May, but then re-leaf as the season progresses, something we now are seeing. Recently we have seen some examples of maple anthracnose fungal disease. I was called out to a landscape in Doylestown where the homeowners were very concerned that "all of the leaves are fallin'" from a beloved maple tree that towers over their deck. We are have this sky-is-falling feeling which in most cases turns out to be a bit overstated due to worry.



Leaf blotching along veins of maple due to maple anthracnose disease (JC)

At most, probably less than 1% of the leaves have fallen and maybe 5% of the leaves showed symptoms of maple anthracnose. And the affected leaves were on the lower portion of the plant. Why on the lower leaves? Because there is poorer air movement there and the maple anthracnose fungus thrives under these conditions. Not to worry, as the temperatures rise with summer this disease is not destined to become worse and worse and in this case this disease is of minor relevance to plant health. A few more leaf sweepings are due but otherwise the deck under this maple will have its summer shade for years to come.



Female flowers and leaves of sourgum (tupelo) in Chatscape (JC)

Tupelo, Honey. In my back yard there are two sourgums, also known as blackgum or tupelo, with the lovely Latin binomial of *Nyssa sylvatica*. I grew them from young plants sold to me by Kenny Cochran at Secrest Arboretum, and now they have grown to the age that they are producing not only their glossy green leaves but also - flowers.

As the Missouri Botanical Garden website indicates, flowers are: “Primarily dioecious (separate male and female trees), but each tree often has some perfect flowers. Small, greenish-white flowers appear

in spring on long stalks (female flowers in sparse clusters and male flowers in dense heads). Although flowers are not showy, they are an excellent nectar source for bees.”

Now I know Kenny’s infinite wisdom: providing both a male and a female sourgum, destined to have male stamens and female pistils. Now, not only do I get to admire their glossy green leaves and pyramidal shapes. Now, some blue fruits will develop on the female sourgum as the season progresses. And, next time I am in Asheville, NC, I will resonate even more as I visit the wonderful Tupelo Honey restaurant. Ah, tupelo honey and biscuits!



Male flowers and leaves of sourgum (tupelo) in Chatscape (JC)

Where Have All The Maple Seedlings Gone? Many have noted this Spring that there are not as many red maple (*Acer rubrum*) seedlings popping up in flower beds. This was illustrated for me last Saturday (June 11) when crossing the footbridge adjacent to the B & O Harmar Bridge, spanning the Muskingum River from Marietta proper to Harmar Village in southern Ohio. I visited this bridge for the first time on June 21, 2013 and at the time took a picture then of the many red maple seedlings sprouting from the wooden railroad ties of the railroad bridge. This year, almost nada for red maple seedlings.



No maple seedlings at Harmar Bridge in June 2016 (JC)



Multiple maple seedlings at Harmar Bridge in June 2013 (JC)

What’s the buzz? Almost certainly, the dearth of seedlings is due to a late winter or early spring frost that damaged the developing ovaries or embryos of these maple flowers. Red maple (and silver maple) seeds mature and germinate in spring and early summer after spring or late winter flowering, while sugar maple (*Acer*

saccharum) seeds do not fully mature and germinate until late summer or fall, which is one of the reasons why red maples tend to outcompete sugar maples in some forest situations.

Note: Visit the wonderful Ohio riverfront town of Marietta – and check out the bridge and the Harmar area that was once the site of Fort Harmar, built in 1785. This bridge, that goes across the Muskingum near the confluence of the Muskingum and Ohio Rivers, started as a covered bridge in 1856, was then converted to a railroad bridge in 1873, and then the pedestrian bridge was added in 1962.

But those berries: taste each day their sweet earthy spring and summer warmth born of soil and sunshine. It is time.