Plant Lover’s Almanac

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Fall is for foliage – and fall is for fruits. Fall is even for – fungi. But before we digress: Believeland should now be known as Relieveland. From Andrew Miller and Cody Allen to the bullpen game after the Trevor Bauer Bloodgate. Relieveland. There, my inner sportswriter is spent, at least until next week’s Fall Classic. Now, for another form of relief from the art of the possible which has become the ever-increasing improbable this political season.

Fruits. Let us start with: fall is for fruits. We sometimes miss this for landscape plants, blinded by apples and apple cider and the final harvests from summer gardens. Yet there is much to enjoy. So here is a short view of a few of The Fruits of Orrville in Wayne County, with an almost finale from Otterbein University in Franklin County.

First, the bubblegum-pink colored fruits of Symphoricarpos, or snowberry. Snowberry has soft pink fruits of fall, almost as if someone stuck their gum on the fruit stalks - peduncles - of this plant. Snowberries are in the Caprifoliaceae, the honeysuckle family, and their Latin genus name comes from the Greek words “symphorein”, meaning “to bear together” and “karpos”, meaning “fruit”. And so it is, the fruits are in clusters.

Then there is one of our few native fruit trees, fruiting abundantly in the backyard of the Eugene Pouly Domaine in Orrville. Namely, persimmon (Diospyros virginiana). The Pouly family enjoys persimmons fresh from the tree, as may you if you plant persimmon trees, but also in a persimmon pudding, perfect as a reminder of native American and Pilgrim harvest feasts. Beware, though, you will quickly be in the mouth sucked-dry mode if persimmons are eaten before they are mushy ripe.

Then, please allow me to introduce a “fruitting structure”, of another ilk, of the pear trellis rust fungus (Gymnosporangium sabine), found on the underside of a leaf of a Callery pear in Orrville’s Cornerstone Park. This fungus cycles between junipers and Pyrus (pear), and is quite showy.

Then, such a revelation to me – check it out before winter comes – the wonderful gumdrop fruits of Canna. I never noticed these until this year, not being overly fond of cannas in general for some reason, though their flowers are colorful and the large-leaves are dramatic. Now I am initiated.
‘Winterthur’ Viburnum nudum is outside the Orrville Library and at Secrest Arboretum in Wooster, quite incredible with its pink, tuning to blue, fruits, completed by mahogany and burgundy foliage.

And – near Otterbein College in Westerville in central Ohio – here come the crabapples.

Which brings us to one last fruitful idea. Springtime has come to Autumn in the Eugene and Judy Pouly Domaine and Chatfield tables this recently: we are dancing around our Maypoles. No, we have not fast-forwarded the seasons. Instead we are enjoying the fruits of springtime flowers. To the point, ‘Maypole’ crabapple flowers of Spring became fruits and this Fall and with Gene’s permission as the landscaper for Cornerstone Park, we collected and my wife Laura made Maypole sauce so sweet and yet so sour.

Laura used the Nearly World Famous Dolgo Crabapple Butter recipe of nurseryman Mike Lee of Oregon, and replacing ‘Dolgo’ with ‘Maypole’, and cutting down on the sugar and cooking time, I can now announce: I Want My Maypole.

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.

The ‘Maypole’ sauce is more sauce-y than ‘Dolgo’ butter, and a lighter color. But it is a wonderful slice of the rainbow.

Foliage. We have entered that world-class time of the year for Ohio and the Eastern United States – the time of fall foliage color. Nevertheless, we are receiving numerous calls about what is wrong with their trees, especially honeylocusts; yellowing leaves and all. Nothing out of the ordinary – it is simply fall foliage time. Despite our warm temperatures and with it seeming like it is still summer - for trees - fall is proceeding as usual. There are factors of temperature and moisture that affect fall coloration intensity, but the key ingredient for fall color starts in the summer at the same time every year, once night lengths increase.
This results in the beginning of the process of leaf abscission. In turn this results in lower chlorophyll production and the start of the unmasking of yellow leaf pigments. Later red pigments are produced and each year, the rest is history.

Check out the National Arboretum and their “Science of Color in Autumn Leaves at: http://usna.usda.gov/PhotoGallery/FallFoliage/ScienceFallColor.html for a good explanation of the process.

Our drought this year will be mute fall foliage effects somewhat, I predict, but it is starting to look a lot like fall out there. Check out especially sourgums in woodland and landscapes, the red maples now and the coming luminosity of sugar maples, and with this can oaks be far behind?

**Fungi.** There are two common tar spots of maple seen in Ohio. One, that occurs commonly on silver and red maple results in dense, tarry spots caused by the fungus, *Rhytisma acerinum*. A second tar spot disease is typically found on Norway maple, with multiple tiny tarry spots that eventually coalesce into a larger spot, not quite as “tarry” but nonetheless black in color, caused by the fungus *Rhytisma punctatum*.

Recently, while out on a photo-foray into nurture and nature, I realized there were symptoms I had not noticed before. Plant pathologists and diagnosticians oft talk of symptoms and signs.

**Signs** are the visible presence of the pathogen, in this case the wavy, raised black “stroma”, the mycelium that is made up of microscopic hyphae of the *Rhytisma* fungus. Signs of this fungal stoma are particularly evident as tarry-like masses from *Rhytisma acerinum*.

**Symptoms** are the response of the infection to the plant cells by the fungus. I have noticed in summer, the symptom of the yellowing of leaf tissue (symptoms) around the developing “punctated” stroma (symptoms) from *Rhytisma punctatum* on Norway maple. What I had not noticed or at least mentally processed until a walk in Wooster recently was the extent of the late season symptom of an intense yellow halo around the stroma of this fungus, or the tendency of part of the leaf falling out of the middle of the stromal “spot”. Eureka.
Bottom line: tar spot of maple is still considered mostly a late-season, cosmetic problem, though *Rhytisma punctatum* infections can result in considerable leaf drop on Norway maples. Fungicides are rarely used. Raking up infected leaves, which would otherwise harbor the pathogen overwinter and serve as a source of new infections next spring, can help limit tar spot next year.

Finally, back to our every four-year fall fixations. And the promised essay by the mid-20th century conservationist Aldo Leopold.

"*Pines have earned the reputation of being* ‘evergreen’ *by the same device that governments use to achieve the appearance of perpetuity: overlapping terms of office. By taking on new needles on the new growth of each year, and discarding old needles at longer intervals, they have led the casual onlooker to believe that needles remain forever green."

"*Each species of pine [and spruce, and fir, etc.] has its own constitution, which prescribes a term of office for needles appropriate for its way of life. Thus the white pine retains its needles for a year and a half; the red and the jack pines for two years and a half. Incoming needles take office each June and outgoing needles write their farewell addresses in October. All write the same thing, in the same tawny yellow ink, which by November turns brown. Then the needles fall, and are filed in the duff to enrich the wisdom of the stand. It is this accumulated wisdom that hushes the footsteps of whoever walks under pines."

Our world goes ever round and round.