

Plant Lover's Almanac

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I received a lovely speaker's gift at the Waynesboro Tree Workshop in Virginia last week: "Ancient Trees: Portraits of Time" by Beth Moon, with images ranging from the phantasmagorical Ifatay Teapot to the Baobabs of Kubu Island. It fully brings to mind the great joys of these large perennial creatures that populate our imaginations. There is a branch of a poem in the limited text of the book, from Richard Wilbur's "A Black Birch in Winter".

"Old trees are doomed to annual rebirth,

New wood, new life, new compass, greater girth,

And this is all their wisdom and their art –

To grow, stretch, crack, and not yet come apart."

And, so it is. Trees are ever with us and ever intriguing. Which brings us to Why Trees Matter – a workshop at the Tree Campus of the College of Wooster, a few weeks away, but more on that later. First, this past Tuesday, a day among the storied trees of Holden Arboretum in ...less than an hour's drive from Akron.

From their website Holden (holdenarb.org) in Kirtland Ohio is "*an outdoor living museum on 3,600 acres that promotes the beauty and importance of trees and other woody plants. The grounds feature over 20 miles of trails that lead you through cultivated gardens and native forests. The Arboretum also features the Murch Canopy Walk, an elevated walkway 65 feet above the forest floor, and the Kalberer Family Emergent Tower, a wooden tower that rises 120 feet above the forest floor for breathtaking views of the surrounding landscape. Together with the Cleveland Botanic Garden, Holden now comprise the Holden Forests and Gardens.*"

Back to the near past. My co-tree people Tuesday were Charles Tubesing, Plant Collections Curator of Holden and Joe Cochran, the Director of the Secrest Arboretum of Ohio State University's Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Where to begin: how about A for *Aesculus*.

Aesculus is the genus for buckeyes and horsechestnuts and at Holden they have many, including a hybrid from Texas of a yellow buckeye and ...not sure. But, oh, those, fruits, all my life I've been waiting for fruits such as these: lovely shiny buckeye fruits with glossy fruits inside, glistening in the afternoon rain. True to at least one of the parents, yellow buckeye, there were multiple seeds per fruits.

Birches (*Betula*). One of my favorite birches, lemon yellow in fall, with cherry-like bark, multi-stemmed with each 40 feet tall in my front yard, is the native sweet birch (*Betula lenta*). Its greatest feature is the twigs which have the methyl salicylate-fueled aromas and taste of wintergreen. In fact, the oils of this birch were once used to make oil of wintergreen for birch beer.

At Holden were two other birches also containing significant methyl salicylate: one of which I was aware of: our native yellow birch (*B. alleghaniensis*), the other one Charles taught me this Tuesday, Japanese cherry birch (*B. grossa*). Sweet.

Finally there were two other lovely native birches we espied from Holden's collections: a triad of paper birch (*B. papyrifera*) and a heat-tolerant and more-than usual alkaline soil tolerant Dura-Heat river birch (*Betula nigra* 'Dura-Heat').

Corylus is for hazelnut and a specimen of *C. fargessii*, a Chinese hazelnut, is truly out-standing in the field at Holden, as is the proud Charles Tubesing. It has a nice rounded shape, lovely fall color and very attractive exfoliating bark. Also C is for *Chinoanthus*, known as white fringetree, and their lovely blue egg-shaped fruits. Fringetree is closely related to ash trees, and emerald ash borer does infest this tree genus, although to date this appears to be a rare event.

Well, we better pick up our alphabetical pace, so let us skip to...

Heptacodium, or seven-sons flower. This large shrub to small tree has attractive shedding bark, a somewhat awkward growth habit, and neat leaf veins that almost look like a willow leaf is embedded within the larger leaf. The real deal though is the extended floral display. It starts with a month of attractive white petal effect, but then will extend the show long after the upcoming Cleveland Indians World Series win with two months or more of attractive sepals (the flower part behind the petals). The sepals start green, but expand in size and become salmon-colored.

M is for *Magnolia*. In this case *Magnolia sieboldii*, introduced by the plant explorer, Philipp Franz von Siebold from Asia in the mid-1800s, is an uncommon magnolia with intermittent white flowers through the growing season. It is now in its fruiting season, with lovely teardrop rose-pink fruits that contain glistening orange-red seeds. Mag-nificent.

P is for *Parrotia*. This member of the witch-hazel family is becoming more popular in gardens. It develops lovely mottled bark over the years, has extremely interesting but tiny vermilion flowers in February snows, and develops brilliant fiery and burnt orange fall foliar colors.

P is also for pawpaw (or as known to the Latin crowd as *Asimina triloba*). Holden has divergent clones of pawpaw so they have fruits, including some very large fruits that will soon be food for wildlife, foiling human foragers also in search of their sickly-sweet tropical fruit taste. Pawpaws are a native fruit tree that is the northernmost genus of a tropical fruited family of plants, and was once a significant culinary savior for the Lewis and Clark Expedition as it headed west.

Q is for *Quercus* (oaks). Holden is a national oak repository and there are too many to recount here, but two that jumped out (no, there were no jumping oak galls – that is a story for another Almanac). One was the Maurice Sendak-like fruits of bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) with their fringe-y acorn cup edges, another was the soft rounded lobes of a Texas post oak (*Quercus stellata*), at Holden prettied up by a lavender-colored fall aster arising from the center of leaves and clustered buds of a low branch of the post oak.

S is for Sumac, even though it is really a shrub rather than a tree. Not the poisonous *Toxicodendron vernix* sumac kind, but

in this case shining or winged sumac (*Rhus copallina*). What a great native landscape plant. Note the winged appendages on the stems. But most of all, plant a few of these for the wonderful glistening fall foliage effects of reds, oranges, purples, and yellows.

Z is for...And, ta da, last but not least, outside the Holden Visitor Center, my love for its juice unparalleled while recently in China, that best of all Latin names – *Ziziphus jujube*, the Chinese date tree, the jujube plant.

Go to Holden this very day, enjoy the trees, and for that matter herbaceous plants, such as the ‘Firecracker’ goldenrod and the yellow jewelweed (*Impatiens pallida*). And if you just cannot get enough of trees and shrubs, call Sarah Mays in our Northeast Region Office first thing Monday morning, and register for our **Selecting Trees and Shrubs for your Landscape School**. It is that very day, Monday, September 25, at Secrest Arboretum in Wooster. A full day of tree and shrub talks and walks, and food. Registration is \$40. Check it out at my website at: <https://agnr.osu.edu/chatfield>, or type in go.osu.edu/chatfield, scrolling down to the program, or contact Sarah Mays at mays.201@osu.edu or 33-263-3831.

Then for a master class in the benefits of trees, their beauty and uses in our urban spaces, landscapes, and woodlands, come join us for the **Why Trees Matter Forum**, held at the College of Wooster on October 18. This all day workshop features everything from Dan Lambe, the President of the National Arbor Day Foundation speaking about their programs, to Secrest’s Paul Snyder speaking of native trees.

From Dan Herms speaking about the implications for plants from climate change, to Phil Olsen of the College of Wooster leading a tour of the College’s arboretum and a talk about their tree program. Toss in an all-star panel discussing the emerging Beech Leaf Disease problem on our American beeches. Registration is \$65 and includes lunch from the great College of Wooster culinary specialists. Register with Sarah Mays at 330-263-3831, mays.201@osu.edu or at <https://agnr.osu.edu/chatfield>, or type in go.osu.edu/chatfield, scrolling down to the program. or contact Sarah Mays at mays.201@osu.edu.

...And if money is an issue, and you are especially hungry for knowledge and for landscape plants, join us for our ArborEatum edible landscaping program (no fee), starting at 5:00 on October 24 at Secrest Arboretum’s Miller Pavilion. Bring your edible landscape creations, and/or your appetites.