

A Few (Near) Perfect "Products"

It seems that I am always on the lookout for the perfect cure, the perfect remedy, for this issue here or that problem over there. And though through the years I have seldom if ever actually found it, I still have not completely lost hope. Now and then a new thing comes along that actually seems to come very close. At that point I will again perk up and take a closer look, even knowing as I do that just like in all those eternal clinical and university studies that love to alternately tease and then frustrate us, some snag will eventually surface.

I've been working with trees for a long time now and that universal principle holds true here as well. Over that time I have studied and watched as protocols and techniques and products come and go. Many will come in with a flourish or some exuberant fanfare and then sometime later exit with a sputter or more likely, just quietly fade away, never to be heard from again.

But there are also the tried and true exceptions, the hangers-on by virtue of their perennial proven efficacy. In the area of insect control on plants, modern **horticultural oil** is one of those "Old Faithfuls." Oil boasts an impressive list of features and desirable benefits. So while not perfect, it does seem to

come pretty close. Low toxicity (plants, animals, and humans), wide application spectrum, easy to apply, and it works! It's a smothering agent that significantly reduces over-



As seen in this conifer example, the plant on the right is visibly more healthy, as a result of mycorrhizae, than the plant on the left. - Photo courtesy of Mycorrhizal Applications, Inc.

wintering egg masses and immature insect populations that can become problematic in the next growing season. Well, you know, I did say "almost perfect." Here's what I consider a small flaw. For good control, oil may or may not require a follow-up of a more aggressive "active" insecticide later in the year, depending on a lot of factors that can vary from year to year.

Mycorrhizal spores are another very old "product." Actually mycorrhizae is an ancient and universal living fungal organism that very often

seems to work near-magic when re-introduced into nutritionally-deprived urban soils. The words means "fungus roots" and refers to the way this family of fungi associates symbiotically with plant roots all over the world. Unfortunately, the activities and projects and "improvements" of men in and on the natural environment can very nearly wipe out these beneficial populations in the soil. I've talked about these in some previous newsletters. So what's relatively new is our ability to re-introduce living replacement spores back into abused needy soils.

A third good idea is more a protocol than a product. It's the practice of regular **soil testing**. And the rationale for it is simple: We can add and take away, supplement, and modify much more intelligently when we know what we're starting with. Therefore, a current soil test is a very good diagnostic tool for effective and intelligent plant care.

If only I could find just a few more "As Good" ideas in some of the other areas of my life!

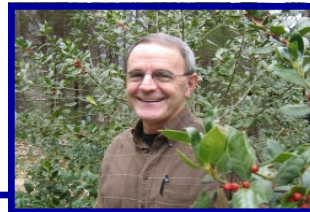
And here's a summary for busy readers who also care about their landscape investments. Check out . . .

1. Horticultural Oils,
2. Mycorrhizal spores,
3. Soil Testing.



From My Journal:

Counting Traffic Lights and Memories



I've been in the so-called "tree business" for thirty-two-plus years now. And come to think of it, I guess it's really not so surprising that I should have spent such a large bulk of my time in that arboreal occupation. In the memorable film *Out Of Africa*, when asked how he and his ex-wife had managed to stay such good friends even after such a disastrous marriage, Bror Blixen succinctly and almost glibly remarked "We started out that way." And in a slightly different sort of way, maybe that's my truth as well. I started out that way. I started out in and around lots of trees from my very early days. In fact, they are the back drop, the stage setting if you will, for some of the best of my old memories.

From the age of seven, I have been a Cordovian. My brother and I roamed what was to us the vast plains and woodlands of Shelby Farms long before it *was* Shelby Farms. With extreme stealth and élan we'd furtively vault the pasture fences on the backside of the (then "No Trespassing") Shelby County Penal Farm. There we spent long hours fishing or hunting down renegade Comanche bands. And we were always in the company of our faithful cow-chasing canine. If it suited our purposes we could, and often did, ramble south all the way to the shady treed banks of the Wolf River, which accommodately transformed for us into our own dark and adventurous Amazon. And the only roads to hazard crossing enroute along this serpentine trek was an occasional single lane gravel and always deserted farm service road.

In those days Walnut Grove did not exist very far beyond White Station. That was great for us but it also meant that the only way to "get to town" (that is, to Memphis) was either around

through Germantown and then in along an only slightly less pastoral two lane and tree-lined Highway 72 or . . . or as the alternative, a winding rural track that followed the Macon Road until it finally passed the notoriously infamous Silver Slipper and then at last spilled out onto Summer Avenue (known to real old-timers as the Bristol Highway). Today that intersection with Summer is re-named Shelby Oaks.

I was driving down Germantown Parkway the other day and out of the blue the thought came to me to count the traffic lights. In 1953 my father, a brick mason and small self-employed contractor, built our then-new house on five acres along the Raleigh-LaGrange Road just about a mile west of the tranquilly rural little two-lane road that decades later would metastasize into the present 6 and 8 lane Germantown Parkway. The brick house Dad built would years later become the Eden Kennel property (now itself closed and vacant).

So as I was driving along in that usual bumper to bumper traffic it occurred to me that in 1953, and for many subsequent years as well, there was only a single flashing yellow caution light at the intersection of Germantown Road and Highway 72 (Poplar) right there in Germantown. Going north from there on Germantown Road, the next traffic signal was another flashing yellow caution light as Germantown Road crossed High-

way 64 at what is now the northwest corner of Bahama Breeze restaurant and the WolfChase Galleria. There was then only an old forlorn-looking gas station on one corner of that intersection and on the other three corners were only stands of trees. In the miles between those two flashing lights was only one single commercial business. At the spot where Dexter crossed Germantown Road in a lazy curvy sort of way, there was an old country store where folks could go in at noon on any hot summer day to buy a thick-sliced bologna sandwich and a coke. Or if you preferred, an RC.

Oh, by the way, now there are twenty-five. Traffic lights, that is, inclusive, between those two intersections of Hiway 72 (Poplar) and Hiway 64 (Stage).



Cordova School, early 1950s, from the ball field

I spent my elementary school years in a wooden floored steam heated building that was years later bought by a group of old-timers who loved it too much to see it succumb to the wrecking ball. Through dedication and hard personal work, they converted it into a community center, museum, library, and site of a community fourth-of-July festival and parade. . . and it still stands. We didn't have enough kids in 1955 for the Cordova third grade to warrant a room for

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itself, so we shared both a room and a teacher with the fourth grade. When we graduated from the eighth grade, it was a big deal. Our little group split up to go to either Germantown or Bartlett or Collierville to high school, depending on an almost sovereign accident of geographical residence. But before we did, we had a traditional eighth grade trip. That year eight of us (almost the whole class) went to the Smoky Mountains with my parents and another set of parents as chaperons. I found an old photo a few years ago taken on that trip. The two things that I remember about that trip was that there were only three girls along, one of whom I had a crush on, and secondly, that I was very self-conscious. You probably can remember how that goes.

Later, in 1986, long out of military service and married for 17 years, I moved my own family back to Cordova, thinking it (life?) would somehow be the same. How naïve of me! While in 1986 Germantown Road was still not yet six lanes and Hiway 64 (the old Stage Road) was still two lanes, yet even then it was not the same. Also, unimaginably massive, rapid and uncontrolled growth was right there on the cusp, like a black thunderstorm boiling almost overhead and you can already smell the rain. In those days before our own three girls grew up and got married I would from time to time, as we drove along the old spots here and there . . . I would be prompted to relate to them tales of “*how it was in the old days*” Inexplicably, they hated that and especially when they were with their girl friends, my wife had to explain to me that my random commentaries were embarrassing to them. I finally caught on and just shut up. Now they’re probably more interested.

When I was fourteen and casting for feisty bream at dusk

with homemade flies, cattle would watch with bovine curiosity from the brow of the hill. In those days I was still getting my mail with the simplest of



addresses: Fred Morgan, Cordova, Tenn. Nothing more. And that’s how they wrote it in those days too: Tenn., not TN, because we could still spare the time to write out four letters. But then there was no zip code to be bothered with.

A few years later, on a warm June night in the summer of 1960, I can still vividly recall driving back home from a date in my father’s borrowed two-tone baby blue and crème ‘56 Oldsmobile. Mine was the only car on the road in either direction, darkness was all around me and Everett Flagg’s Music ‘Til Midnight was on radio. I could turn off my headlights and drive by the light of the moon. Of course my windows were down and at eleven thirty, as I approached the two-lane Germantown Road bridge that crossed the Wolf, the cool air on my face in concert with the sudden loud accompaniment of croaking frogs and the sweet smell of honeysuckle infused my senses. All of it together worked a magic upon me, titillating my callow and already susceptible romantic anticipation of high ad-

venture and great expectations. These days, no matter how I try, I just can’t seem to recover that same ambiance upon any crossing of Bobby Lanier’s six lane steel and concrete bridge.

Cordova’s old community motto, “Farms, Flowers, and Fellowship” has been virtually lost now for some years, right along with its rusty and rotted signboard into a both literal and metaphoric weedy ditch along the side of the frantic and now frightfully inadequate Macon Road. A year or so ago I was elated to see a new wrought-iron reincarnation suddenly appear on a masonry base, almost like a memorial. But it was soon vandalized and now is no longer. Long gone also are the days when those words *really were* an accurate descriptive. The Moore farm, the Humphreys farm, the Yates farm, the Schwam farm, the Rogers farm; all gone with the gladiolas and the annual summer community-wide Brunswick stew event held in the old oak-shaded Cordova Park. Who knows now even where that is anymore.

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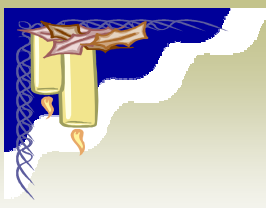
As the years pass we all, even if just by default, collect more and more stories that, for the most part, the younger generations often care little

to hear. So the younger generations and the masses of imported new Cordovians (really “Memphians” now), maybe formerly from New York and California and Illinois and Tulsa or elsewhere, know nothing of and may not even care to know about such as this. But our stories, wherever they reside, are the essence of who we are, even when they randomly surface while crazily counting traffic lights on Germantown Parkway.

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Did You Know . . .

. . . that you can grow your own heritage oak tree from an acorn, starting out in a Back Yard Burger styrofoam cup. It can be a fascinating learning experience for kids *of all ages* (and maybe even a project for school). In the end, it will be a legacy to you as your children and grandchildren sit under it and enjoy its shade. To learn more about how to do it, use "oak acorns" as a key word in a google search. And while you're there you can learn that white oaks produce acorns every year while red oaks produce fruit (acorns) only on alternate years.

. . .and that when it's time to trim your trees 1) it is good practice to ensure that no more than 25% of healthy leaf tissue is removed, 2) that the workmen should not be wearing climbing spurs (those steel things on their feet) that gouge and wound your tree, opening it to infection and oozing, 3) that elm trees should only be pruned during the colder months of the year, 4) that prunings should be removed uniformly throughout the entire canopy, not just stripping out the interior that gives it a "poodled" look, and 5) that "topping" is usually not a good idea for a lot of reasons, including the creation of systemic stress and the beginning of unsafe, abnormal, and irreversible growth patterns.

Phomopsis On Juniper, Arborvitae, and Cypress

It is probably worthwhile talking about what looks like a recent surge of an old problem. Many of us have juniper, arborvitae and/or cedars (such as Leylands) as a part of our landscapes. This past season I have noticed a resurgence of a standard nemesis, possibly aggravated by persistent wet weather. It is Phomopsis tip blight, a fungal disease that can mar the appearance of these ornamentals and in severe cases kill them. Symptoms are browning of the terminal tips of branches that will later devolve to an ash-gray color. Phomopsis usually only impacts the terminal four (4) to six (6) inches of the branch because older mature foliage is more resistant to the fungus. Take a look at the illustration here.



Appearance of Phomopsis tip blight on juniper.

If you look carefully and with the aid of a hand lens, you can see the small black fruiting spores of this disease on the impacted tissue.

Phomopsis usually begins to appear in mid-spring and continue through the summer, but it can in fact be a problem in the fall and winter as well if conditions are right for it. Excessively warm wet environments and weather periods are prime incubators for this

detractive problem. And while the disease is usually more serious on younger plants, even mature individuals can be infected when these conditions are in place.

One contributing factor can be the excessively tight spacing of plant

groupings. Good air movement and access to sunlight helps to retard the appearance of phomopsis. Another causal factor can be excessive or misplaced irrigation that keeps plant foliage wet. If you are cutting out tissue already infected, do so only when the plant is dry and there is no rain in the forecast for a few days. Set your irrigation schedule to operate in the early morning hours rather than in the evening. This will assist in the quick drying of plant tissues.

If you are installing new cedars, juniper, or arborvitae, search out those varieties that are more resistant and give each plant plenty of room and air space. Also it can be helpful to apply an early spring fungicidal series on susceptible plants. This service is available as one part of our Vita-Care program. Call me with any questions or if you would like to sign up for this chemical assistance.

