

Winter 2009



MORGAN TREE SERVICE, INC.
THE "VITACARE" COMPANY

Tree Times

When the cold winter winds whip across our faces or whistle under our eaves, we might think of how we can aesthetically institute an abatement program for the winters still ahead. Strategically located trees of the right kind can be one effective way to get some help. Because wind chill has a cooling effect on more than just our ears and fingers, it can also increase the cost of staying warm even indoors in the wintertime. A dense line of specifically selected plant material on the windward side of your residence may not only provide a visual/privacy barrier year-round but as well may significantly diminish the heat loss impact of those winter winds.

If you have good sunlight on the west to north sides and the horizontal and vertical room for it there, a row of Chinese weeping privet (*Ligustrum sinense pendula*) is a fine answer both as a privacy and wind screen. It may take three years or so to gain an effective height of six-plus feet and characteristic density, but the plants will grow both up and out, meshing together and making a full green canopy that blocks both the wind and visibility. For maintenance-free screen you'll eventually need almost as much lateral space as you expect in vertical height. Weeping Privet rows in near full sun

can grow to twelve feet. Another thing I like about this plant both as a visual and wind screen is its habit of merging into what ultimately appears as one long integrated row of foliage. While ligustrum sinense can be pruned, where there is room it just as often is allowed to grow free style with minimal maintenance. This allows it to take on the visual "weeping" characteristic that its name suggests.

"A dense line of specifically selected plant materialmay significantly diminish (your) heat loss."

A less-space-consuming but not quite as effective option may be Virginia Pine. Do not be seduced by the slightly faster growing loblolly. While it starts out with great promise, the Loblolly soon reaches heights that are far above eye level and eventually roof level with lit-

brittle and prone to breakage.



American Arborvitae

A third, though possibly more expensive near-full-sun option for ten to twenty year functionality and with greater line-of-sight density than pines is Arborvitae, *Cryptomeria Japonica* or Wax Myrtle. Kenneth Mabry at Dan West says he'd like to add Leyland Cyprus to that list but hesitates because of its susceptibility to stress-induced canker. I agree. Arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis*), especially the "Emerald", "Nigra" or other cultivars that resist winter discoloration are effective screens but may require more maintenance.

Stay away from pear trees unless you're an orchardist. While colorful with spring-time's white blossoms, bacterial Fire Blight disease and mechanical/structural failure are common and serious risks with many of these.



Weeping privet is largely maintenance free

tle green needle left lower down to block the winds. Mature large loblollies are likely more of a winter hazard than a benefit because the wood is so



Risk Assessment: Catching Trouble Before It Catches You

It's likely that sometime in the last few years you have driven along some street and with shock and awe seen the destructive impact of a large tree that has fallen through the middle of someone's house.

At the end of January I am conducting an all-day seminar at the Botanic Garden on the topic of Tree Risk Assessment. It's content will be geared primarily for tree care practitioners here in the Mid-South. At our last annual ASCA conference in Tucson in early December '08 the topic of the all day Pre-

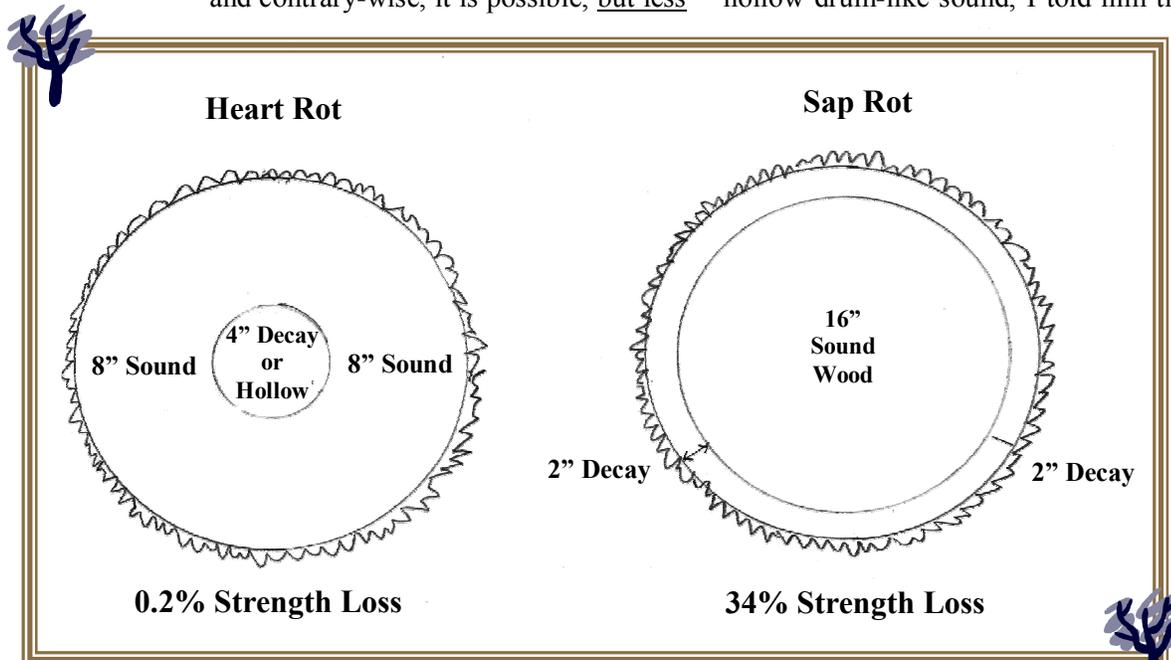
Conference seminar there was also Tree Risk Assessment. And in one of my past newsletters Tree Risk Assessment was the subject. So what's all the fuss about 'Tree Risk Assessment'?

Maybe the best answer is to say that when trees that are genuine candidates for this work are ignored, there can be coming down the pike a bitter and expensive price for someone to pay in property damage, potential personal injury and/or, worst case, death. Memphis is a city that values its large trees, as it should. Towering oaks provide value and amenities for us in a number of important ways. But just like people, big trees get old and with age comes various levels of instability and susceptibility to a veritable buffet of potential hazards and flaws.

Most of the time these maladies and flaws are accompanied by characteristic telltales. There are several possibilities here. First, it's important to know that the presence of those telltales does not automatically and infallibly indicate a doomed tree; that is, it may be

flawed but not critically so. Secondly and contrary-wise, it is possible, but less

when I heard a distinctively disturbing hollow drum-like sound, I told him that



probable, that a telltale-free tree is also a candidate for some form of risk abatement. But it is always true that telltales should be identified, monitored, and possibly evaluated rather than just ignored. And further, a simple sounding with a rubber mallet or plastic hammer can often identify certain types of concerns even in a non-symptomatic patient.

A few years back I was invited to a property to look at and offer my best thoughts about a large oak that was alleged to be in

decline. The oak was over 36" in diameter and located in the middle of a wood deck adjacent to the homeowner's swimming pool. My client had been concerned about the tree's

health based on the look of a few leaves. But otherwise the tree seemed just fine. So he was a bit perplexed when, simply out of practiced habit, I brought out my mallet and went around the base of his oak, tapping at the lower trunk just above deck level. It was only to be a quick and simple little check that would take no more than half a minute. But

I wanted to go one step further. I went to my vehicle and brought back a 12" diagnostic bit and drilled into the wood. The bit went into the wood only two or three inches before it collapsed rapidly into an interior hollow. Next I inserted a 30" long small-diameter steel probe into the small drill

hole I had just made. It went in all the way to the hilt. I told the owner that unfortunately he should forget

about the leaves and the top condition, now a moot point, and schedule a removal crew as soon as possible. Happily, after recovering from his shock, he *did* schedule a crew. A \$1,900.00 removal saved him multiple thousands in property damage and possibly worse.

That sort of dramatic story doesn't happen every day ... but it *does* happen.

The accompanying drawing here is interesting in its implications. The critical issue with hollow trees is not just whether it is hollow but rather how severely so.

"I told the owner that he should forget about leaves and top condition ... and schedule a removal crew as soon as possible."

"...just like people, big trees get old and with age comes various levels of instability and susceptibility..."

Interesting Southwestern Discoveries



How do cowboy movies relate to Harborist conferences? Well ... Every year during the first week of December I look forward to spending at least four days at the annual conference of the American Society of Consulting Arborists. ASCA is a society of experienced arborists who have devoted themselves to "...bring(ing) a comprehensive, objective viewpoint to the diagnosis, appraisal and evaluation of arboricultural issues." The conference is an excellent venue for gaining new insights and information both through seminars and valuable networking with long-time colleagues and friends from all over the country. In previous years we've enjoyed the attractions in and around places like Napa, Palm Springs, Philadelphia, Boston and Newport.

But the conference this year was in Tucson Arizona, a southwestern city that until recently and in fact through all of my sixty-four years I have known only by reputation and only by the famous legend of a mid-day horse corral shootout in nearby Tombstone.

lore even though I was still continually reminded of those old western movies by that classic scenery.

plant world. Yet while it is frequently imagined to be exclusively a soft pulpy plant, it has a skeleton of hard wood which makes it durable even with its shallow root system. The slow-growing and long-lived Saguaro usually does not add the first of it's characteristic "arms" until it is about seventy-five years old.

Another fascinating desert tree is the Palo Verde. Arizona's state tree comes in two flavors, Little Leaf (*Cercidium microphyllum*) and the Blue Palo Verde (*C. floridum*). Maybe for me the most interesting feature of the Palo Verde (Spanish for "green wood or stick") is its evolved ability to photosynthesize through its green bark.

This is important to the plant's survival in the desert since during the summer hot season it typically drops leaves and branches. The Palo Verde also serves as a "nurse plant" for the Saguaro cacti by providing canopied shade and warmth during the cacti's early days. Palo Verdes range through central and south-



Saguaro Cactus

The Arizona-Sonoran Desert Museum is a blue ribbon fast course in desert flora and fauna featuring over 1300 types of plants and 300 desert-living creatures. For this arborist, one of the most interesting new *extra-conference* discoveries was to learn about two fascinating plants that will never be found occurring naturally in the Mid-South. The Saguaro Cactus, possibly the official plant icon of the American Southwest, is an amazing structure that can tower up to thirty-plus feet in height with a potential 18" to 24" girth. Getting up close to a big one is an experience. It's flower, which appears every year regardless of rainfall, is the Arizona state flower. Typically in the background of many old southwestern "cowboy movies", this

prickly – Yes, it features dangerous two-to-three inch thorns! – and majestic water tank can hold up to a ton of water in its porous swelling tissue; the camel of the



Palo Verde

ern Arizona and southeastern California.

And I didn't even mention Eucalyptus. There is so much of interest in and around Tucson and the southwestern desert to see and learn about that I now find that I would enjoy a soon return visit.



Saguaro Cactus

To my delight there proved to be much more in and around Tucson than just historic old-west folk-



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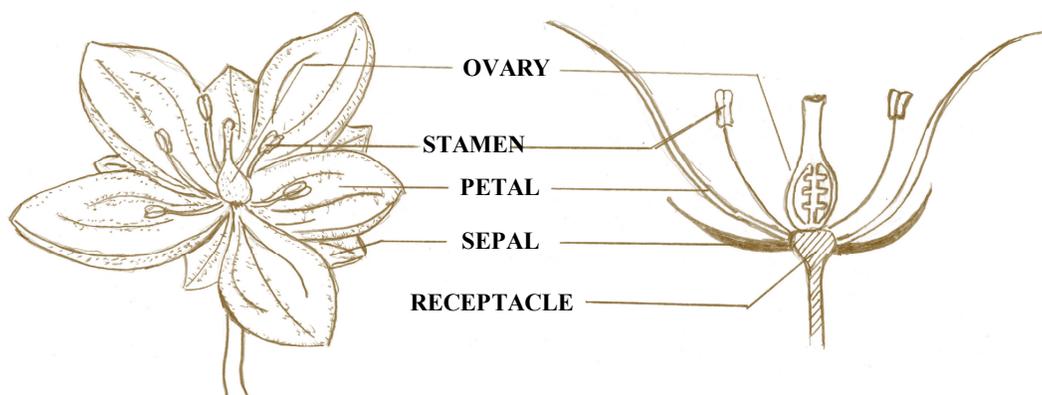
Did You Know . . .

...that based on the way that trees reproduce, there are three types. First, there are trees that have **perfect flowers**, meaning that both the male and female parts (the stamen and the pistil/carpel) are contained within the same flower. Ash, Buckeye and most fruit trees fall within this group.

The second reproductive class of trees are those that bear male and female parts on separate structures (flowers) but on the same tree. Such flowers are referred to as **imperfect flowers**. Examples within this general group are walnut, birch, and alder.

The third class is composed of trees that require cross-pollination because they are individually either male or female trees, never both. Examples here are Poplar, Persimmon, Willow, Holly, and Ginkgo.

However, the prehistoric Ginkgo is unique even in this group because it is technically not an **angiosperm** like the others. Instead it is in the **gymnosperm** class with most cone-producing conifers because the Ginkgo's seed develops outside of an enclosed ovary. Almost all coniferous (cone-bearing) trees are also wind-assisted cross-pollinating like the Ginkgo because male pollen cones are located low in the canopy while the female seed cones are typically higher up in the canopy.



Drawing adapted from Tree Maintenance, Pirone, 6th ed.

What? Another Gall Reminder?

When I was a kid there was a common saying: "He sounds like a broken (scratched) record." It was a euphemism for stating that the guy had a bad habit of repeating himself. I'm not too sure that old saw translates anymore except to some of my older readers because the youngest ones are liable to ask "What is a record?"

But all that to say this: I'm going to be brave and remind you again that January and February is the time to treat your gall-laden oak tree(s) with Merit to suppress the next generation of that unsightly and vigor diminishing tumor-like growth. For very large oaks, the earlier the better in order to allow time for the active ingredient to get to the twig. If you want to know more about this call me or go to my website morgantreeservice.com.



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