
About trees: There's a lot going on overhead

By Fred Morgan

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There is a world of diversity over our heads and around us all the time, but most of us walk right past it.

I'm talking about the different ways trees reproduce.

Did you know that all trees have flowers of one kind or another? Even the oak has flowers that bear no resemblance to what we think of as a flower. The sweet gum has a flower so small and obscure that we forget or never realize it's there at all.

Angiosperms are a class of plant, including most trees, whose seed is enclosed within a carpal or ovary sheath. Within this class there are three different ways that reproduction occurs.

First, there are certain 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 class of trees includes 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 either male or female trees. Examples here are poplar, persimmon, willow, holly and ginkgo.

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 (naked seed) with most cone-producing conifers, because the ginkgo's seed develops outside of an enclosed ovary.

Almost all coniferous (cone-bearing) trees are also cross-pollinated by wind and external elements. Male pollen cones are located low in the canopy, while the female seed cones are typically higher up in the canopy.

So next time you're at the park or even outside on your own property, take an

appreciative look up and consider what's going on in the trees.

They'll be in the process right about now of making new flowers, new fruit and even new trees.

Fred Morgan of Cordova is a certified arborist.

More on trees

Learn more about trees Saturday at a tree care lecture, walk and Q&A with Fred Morgan 10:30 a.m. to noon at Dixon Gallery and Gardens (Hughes Pavilion). Cost: \$10; \$5 for members. Reservations required. Call 761-5250.



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