



Wilson's Nursery



Connie's Corner

Pumpkin Spice and Everything Nice

by Connie Kratzke

Hello Everyone! This writing format feels a little foreign after taking the social media route for a while. Sometimes it's hard to shut off the noise in my head and organize my thoughts. Snapping a few pictures and paraphrasing plant descriptions doesn't place the same demands. My ideas are still all over the place, but I'll try to whip them into something useful. They are all seasonally relevant, so at least there's that.

Naturally, fall color is on everyone's minds. Things are a little bland in comparison with last year, but our heel yards and fields are brightening up. As usual, 'Autumn Blaze' is living up to its name. Maples aren't the only choices though and many cities aren't including them in their boulevard plantings, due to monoculture concerns. There are other downsides, too. Our yard is predominantly sugar maples and we rake for two months straight each year. We've also invested in spendy gutter guards to keep the helicopters from accumulating into organic dams. There are cleaner options.

Dakota Pinnacle Birch is one that always comes to mind. Fall color is a bright, shiny, lingering gold. Ginkgos and Honeylocusts also offer lovely yellow hues. Male Ginkgos

are tidy trees that generally drop their leaves all at once for easy clean-up. The pinnately compound foliage of Honeylocusts nearly disappears after it falls, adding organic matter to the soil. Blue Beeches (and their showy cultivars like Firespire® and Fire King™) offer many of the same hues maples do in tidier packages.

For those who appreciate the wildlife value of fruiting trees, there are some stunning crabapples. Starlite™ immediately comes to mind with its shiny, red, persistent fruits produced against a background of brilliant gold. Rejoice™, Royal Raindrops®, Red Barron, Pink Sparkles® and Harvest Gold all take on impressive autumnal tones. Many ornamental and edible fruit trees brighten up in the fall. Korean Sun Pear absolutely glows. Nannyberry Viburnums, Mountain Ashes, Autumn Brilliance Serviceberries and Thornless Cockspur Hawthorns all contribute to the cornucopia. Whether or not fruit is a nuisance really depends on location and customer. I have seldom seen a dropped Nannyberry or Serviceberry.

For those who don't mind a few nuts on the ground, Horsechestnuts (Buckeyes) and Oaks turn some lovely shades. Early Glow™ Ohio Buckeye is supposed to be light on the nuts. I cannot speak to this, so I'll have to pay closer attention. Because plants generally come into bearing with age, that can be hard to assess in a nursery setting. Reds and Northern Pins are the first Oaks we think of for fall color, but they don't always thrive in urban settings. Crimson Spire™ is a lovely columnar tree that adapts well to less than ideal conditions. Prairie Stature® is a larger hybrid that is still underutilized. Do not disregard these English Oak/White Oak crosses. They really are solid performers that contribute shades of red and purple in the fall with higher transplant success than their native parents.

As the season comes to a close and we work to get everything buttoned up, I think it's important to address irrigation. Watering should not stop when it becomes less pleasant to do it. Obviously, woody plants that color up and drop their leaves have low moisture demands. That does not mean they should go into the winter dry. While evergreens display their drought stress more dramatically, all trees and shrubs should go into a hard freeze, hydrated. I used to tell my customers that trees should be provided with a volume of water roughly equal to their root mass weekly during the growing season. Water should be delivered slowly and evenly and allowed to soak in. Once night temps. drop and leaves drop, switching to bi-weekly watering is fine. However, until the ground actually freezes, it's good to pay attention to the weather. Wind can really desiccate evergreen foliage. Proper hydration throughout the growing season builds a hard cuticle that seals in moisture. Water is an insulator that protects plant cells and moderates soil temperature. While the logistics of blowing out irrigation systems cannot be ignored, it's good to have a plan that extends beyond that.

Winter presents a variety of challenges for landscaping adjacent to roads and walkways. Aerosolized salt spray and soil salt accumulation cause different types of damage for different plants. Various things influence the severity of damage. Higher speed limits transport salt further. Salt accumulations are more significant in heavy, poorly drained soils. Analyzing sites carefully will help you make the best choices. Considering how accumulating precipitation will be cleared and where it will go are equally important. Regardless of whether there is salt mixed with the snow or not, it has the potential to damage plants. Where will the emergency shoveling crew toss the stuff? The answer is the path of least resistance. Well-intended, retired neighbors may decide to "help out" or a generally responsible teen may have an apathetic day. Snow and salt end up where they end up when it's coming down hard and fast and slips and falls are on the brain. Plan for it. Worst case scenarios are more likely than we care to admit.

There. I did it. I hope you get something out of this! I am wildly distracted with trying to

prioritize my own, end-of-season to-do list. Both here and at home, autumn is making demands. Currently, my spare time is spent doing everything I can think of with an abundance of relatively bland, yellow apples. When I'm not doing that, I'm raking. These repetitive activities have meditative qualities and I generally enjoy them, though I will relish in their completion even more. To every thing there is a season and I'll welcome the next one!

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