

Readers speak up on choosing tree species



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I recently received some responses to my February column, an embarrassment of riches but greatly appreciated. Each person had something to add to my points, an example of the wide range of knowledge and experience that exists in the green industry.

Thomas Smith, of Spring Grove Cemetery and Arboretum, Cincinnati, OH, called and, as an educator, expressed his eagerness to get out information on the use of native trees. He even offered the use of his extensive slide materials. It was a generous and appreciated offer that I hope

to be able to use in the future.

Jim Wollney, of Church Landscape, Wadsworth, IL, sent a fax that told me that I wasn't the only one who looked at trees. Jim's point was that tree form is also a valuable landscape consideration:

"I also think that there are different forms of trees to use besides the lollipop we typically plant. I enjoy seeing low branches and clump forms of ash and linden in the wild areas."

The visual variety that exists in nature can be an attractive addition to a landscape. Multi-stemmed trees, properly chosen and situated, are another way of adding to the character of a location. When they have an interesting bark texture or color, the effect is further enhanced. Crimson King maples are nice in their place, but there is room for so much more variety. We need to educate ourselves AND our clients.

Regulating biodiversity?

Tom Knowles, an urban forestry consultant in Columbia, SC, e-mailed me with a thought on taking diversity too far: "One community in our area is currently considering changing their existing tree and landscape ordinance to reflect an increase in biodiversity concepts.... Anyway, this community is considering a species make-up requirement of no

more than 10% of a single species on any commercial property. This means that on new landscapes being developed within the town limits, the landscape contractor would be required to plant no more than 10% of material in any one species. Now typically, a commercial site may have 4 to 6 street trees on the site. Can you imagine...1 oak, 1 maple, 1 ash, 1 birch, etc?..."

"My point is, we have to be careful how we promote species diversity and be REAL about it. This community is getting ready to adopt something that may be a nightmare to look at in 10 to 20 years. Species diversity needs to be studied on a regional or community-wide basis."

Tom's point shows us how a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing. A well-meaning group of people, no doubt, but the need for professional, balanced input is essential. There are a number of ways to address tree species choices in the community. This could include:

- * a list of approved species for the community, regularly updated
- * a rebate through a local nursery for people who purchase approved species
- * knowledgeable decisions on tree species choices made for community property
- * planning, by not planting a single species in a neighborhood, but using a variety.

The situation brings us around, once again, to my comment in February that short-sightedness and a lack of familiarity with trees can lead to some poor decisions. This could be said about many local issues. The involvement of knowledgeable professionals in the community is an essential contribution.

I want to thank the people who commented on my last column. And to those of you who have sent your comments on previous columns, I may not get a column out of them, but I do keep them on file, as a reminder of what I am doing right and wrong.

Agree/Disagree? Comments/Questions? Column Suggestions? Let Nancy Stairs know at 440/891-2623. Fax: 440/891-2675. E-Mail: nstairs@advanstar.com