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In the January soapbox, Tory suggested that we all latch on to a customer, vendor, or anyone that is willing to communicate about the nursery industry. I agree with him 100 percent. Communication of ideas is always a good exchange. Later I will suggest that we take it even a step further for the benefit of us all. Tory may have gotten more than he bargained for when he latched on to me. (I hope he doesn't regret it after reading this article!) To practice what he preached, Tory was discussing the state of the nursery and landscape industry with me at a recent trade show. We discussed shortages and oversupply of trees, cultivar selection and characteristics of specific species and cultivars within them. We talked about color, that always so important characteristic when choosing just the right tree. I told Tory that I had an idea of how landscape designers and architects should use trees and plants in many of their plans. Not to say that they are doing it wrong now mind you, but that I had a method to choose trees and plants that would (in my mind anyway) look more natural and random as they would be in nature (not to mention that it would probably cause them to use more trees and plants), which I thought was good for everyone.



Take for example, the do-it-yourself homeowner who appreciates trees and plants and actually researches them to become familiar with their characteristics and requirements like soil type, exposure, cold hardiness, height and width at maturity, and of course, COLOR. This person has a house lot that is maybe $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre in size and he/she decides there is room for about 6 to 10 trees in the yard, based on the locations he painstakingly chooses to put them. He then applies the parameters of size, color, etc. Now remember that this house is in a subdivision or group of 50 or more homes. Each homeowner goes through this same process or different degrees of this process. The subdivision ends up with some different trees but because we as humans tend to arrive at similar conclusions about color, many of the trees in the yards are Red Sunset or October Glory or Cleveland Select Pear, etc. (Anyway I think you get my point!). Architects and designers selecting trees for their fall color only or some other specific characteristic, sometimes risk overusing one or two kinds of trees in their landscape plans.

Now all these homeowners have seen the fall colors of trees as they are traveling around and this is to a certain extent what they are trying to replicate in their yard. The difficulty is that they are limited by the constraints of property lines, budget and lack of knowledge about design, color and perhaps even the existence of some kinds of trees and their unique attributes. I must admit here that many trees in the yard can be planted without any other trees close to them and they will thrive and look fine. This is perfectly acceptable to me in a limited way. I am suggesting a new and different approach to selecting trees for the borders between properties and the overall planting plan for an entire subdivision or entire town or city that takes into account the contours of the land, grade changes and natural and man made runoff areas. These areas could be densely planted with a variety of trees, which would mimic a natural forest stand more closely.

When we travel around and see the fall colors change on native stands of trees we admire the colors and remember the rich reds, oranges, and yellows that make up this show of color. What we do not seem to notice and remember is that besides these intense reds, oranges and yellows, also present are the colors of green, brown and other hues that are somewhat inconspicuous to us as we drive by. These other colors serve to contrast with and enhance the effect of the reds, oranges and yellows which we appreciate so much.

In an attempt to describe how architects and designers could create plans that would resemble the natural color shows that we favor in the fall, I said; “Tory do you remember watching the adventures of Walt Disney as a kid?” (He admitted that he did.) “You know in the beginning of each episode that little fairy flies across the screen with her magic wand? She waves it as she passes across the screen and out of it comes stars of all colors and they spread out in front of the castle and finally cover the screen with colored stars and then the story begins”. (Bet you are sorry you missed this conversation - right!) I explained to Tory that I thought designers needed a drawing pen like this (I call it the Walt Disney pen that you take the top off and load with all kinds of trees). This pen, would be loaded with all the different species and cultivars like Maples, Hackberry, Oaks, Linden, Locust and a multitude of trees that will grow in the area they are designing. Together these trees display all kinds of fall colors. Then when they draw around the borders of properties or common areas or city parks all these trees would come flowing out in a random order to fill these areas with a plethora of colors we see in nature. Now, realize that I do not mean literally random placement of trees. Architects and designers are professionals at applying rules of color contrast and placement of plants with different mature sizes, textures and growth habits. I am only suggesting that we plant border areas of properties more densely and with more variety.

Designers and architects should be aware of the many different cultivars and species of trees grown successfully in the region they are designing. The nursery trade has been increasing the variety of trees available.

We now have plants like Three-flowered, Paperbark, Trident and many other small maples to choose from being grown right here in the midwest. Trees such as *Carpinus fargesii*, *Cladrastis*, *Chionanthus*, and *Halesia* are also readily available. Forest Lawn (our nursery) lists 50 different genera of trees we currently grow. Imagine how different a subdivision would look if every landscape of each home were designed using the ‘Disney pen’ method along the borders of lots and natural drainage areas. Of course, this would likely require the use of many more trees than are generally used in landscapes, but what would be the harm in that? Maybe the homeowner would have to mow a little less grass or there would be increased habitat for wildlife like birds, etc. Maybe many of us would appreciate being able to enjoy the show of fall colors without having to get in the car and drive down the highway.

If this method of designing were to become a more common practice, it would increase the actual tree density in these areas and thereby increase demand for trees. Budget concerns may initiate planting of mass numbers of smaller trees in these areas, but still there would be many different sizes of trees used. Since they would be planted in beds closer together than normal, there would be an increased need for mulched areas under these plantings. Landscapers would have more work in planting these areas and perhaps cause some of them to develop economical ways to install this type of design. I doubt that I would get an argument against the fact that it would provide larger cooler areas from the shade given off by the canopies of these trees as they became mature.

Now I agree that we should all latch on to customers and vendors to discuss and communicate about the nursery industry. I also think we should pass the idea of the Walt Disney pen between friends and neighbors and perhaps the public, to effect a shift in the design and planting of our landscapes to the benefit of everyone.

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