



## KAT NURSERIES

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Well here we go again. After a brief respite from the Soapbox (things just got too busy! ...yea, what's new!) KAT Nurseries has decided to revive the newsletter with the same purpose as before. For those who might have forgot, the Nurseryman's Soapbox is intended for Nurserymen (and women) to share opinions and ideas about fun and exciting things: plants, trees, soil, chemicals, insects, diseases, seasonal color, tools, weather, or whatever green industry topic might put normal human beings to sleep. But the kicker is that it'll be a nursery or other Green Industry professional who's writing the article. It might be factual, it might be hunch, could be an opinion, or just telling about the way things have been done for years in a nurseryman's world.

One change, however is we are going to try to send out the newsletter via email, exclusively. It's time even us-nurserymen join the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. So if you know a fellow professional (or amateur/student, for that matter) that might need some bathroom reading, feel free to forward this and hopefully they will give us a note to sign them up!

We still plan to call on other Green Industry professionals from all over North America to speak their piece on this topic or that, to ensure that this little letter is never tainted with KAT propaganda. Well, not every time, anyway. So, if you have some piece of valuable green industry information that you want to share, please feel free to submit your article. Or, if you're dying to learn the nurseryman's point of view on any topic, just ask, and we'll find a professional we know to address the subject.

With that said, we would like to repeat an article written in a previous Soapbox, a few years ago on 'Time to Dig' which we thought might be timely. We hope you enjoy the reincarnated newsletter and look forward to a great fall and short winter.



### **Can You Dig It Man?**

It's that time of year again, and everybody wants to know when this or that can be dug. Well prepare to be informed. Enlightened, mind you, with theory, my theory on the do's and don'ts of fall digging. First and foremost let's establish the parameters of the theory. **A.** We're talk'n larger caliper trees, and **B.** They're harvested and to be planted in the Kansas City vicinity. This is key, because the rules change as you move around the country. For example, I was in Chicago last week (mid September) touring nurseries and they were digging. Digging everything, Ash, Locust, Linden, Pear and Crab in full leaf. Needless to say, I was blown away. The rule of thumb there is that when things are hardened off and temperatures moderate, its go time. Now that might fly her some years, on some varieties, but it's definitely not recommended. Anyway, let's get into how things work in K.C. The way I see it, there are four categories to put trees into with regard to fall digging. **1.** When it hardens off, dig it. **2.** When it's in full color, dig it. **3.** When you don't see any leaves, dig it. **4.** If you dig it, it's toast.

### **1. When it hardens off, dig it**

Let me start by saying that it's very important to consider digging conditions, especially in this category because it can begin in late July or early August. If the ground is bone dry and it's 100 degrees, everything is in category 4. Anyway, if there's ground moisture and reasonable temperatures, Pines, Spruce, Boxwood, Arborvitae, Junipers and basically all evergreen conifers fall into this category. They dig just as well in August as they do in April. There is a trick though. These plants are going to be temperamental with regard to water. Lots and lots of fall dug conifers will die but that has nothing to do with being fall dug. It has to do with the care they receive. The driest time of year in our area is the winter and these conifers will demand watering during this period. Even a conifer planted in September will have little chance to re-establish itself. A little trick that we use in the nursery is to spray the evergreens we carry-over a couple times with an anti-desiccant such as wilt-proof or vapor-guard, maybe once in mid December and the other in late January. And of course when we get a little Indian Summer, they get a shot of water.

### **2. When it's in full color, dig it.**

Ash, Maples, Crabapples, Cherries, and Pear headline the list of this category. These are all trees with a very fibrous root system and transplant easily in the spring or the fall. The reason for waiting to see color, is because color is the first sign that the tree is going dormant on its own terms. It has prepared itself for the winter season by sending all kinds of goodies down to the root system for safe storage over the winter. It has also greatly reduced its water need and, if for some reason, the tree was dry immediately after harvesting, it would be able to defend itself against desiccation by simply dropping the colored leaves. Essentially, the abscission layer is beginning to form when the tree is in color.

### **3. When you don't see any leaves, dig it.**

Most folks call this the fall hazard list. I guess that's fair, but I really don't see it that way. I think it's fine to dig Birch, Redbud, Locust, Gum, and some Oaks in the fall, late fall. I've had good success. I think the reason why we've had good success is because of a

number of factors. The most important factor, I think, is that we use very little fertilizer in our production program. I believe that especially with Honey Locust artificially elongated nodes due to over fertilization create a tree prone to desiccation and die-back over the winter months. The other factor I can attribute my confidence to, is the use of container liners or undercut liners in our production program. Basically, what I'm saying here is that trees such as Bald Cypress, Redbud, Birch, and Oak can be forced to produce a more fibrous root system by chemically, mechanically, or air pruning the root system before the tree is planted into production. I prefer air pruning because I believe it reduces transplant shock when the liner is put into production. The point is all these techniques work, and if proper production procedures are followed, it is not hazardous to dig in the fall. Now, I want to stress this: The production technique is crucial.

### **4. If you dig it, it's toast**

Red Oak to me is a spring dig. And by spring, I don't mean March. I mean big, fat, swollen buds in April. Red Oak, Scarlet Oak and White Oak are difficult little buggers but I've seen lots and lots be transplanted successfully and every single one was dug when they were breaking bud. My Pop used to dig the things in a little hand ball with two inches of new growth pushed out and they always lived and not only lived but flourished. I don't even want to begin to explain it but it works. And as the Nurseryman's world turns, new technology improves our lives but old school prevails.

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