Archive for August, 2009

A Basic Agreement
Sunday, August 2nd, 2009

Once you have decided to hire an arborist, it will be necessary to develop a basic agreement; a contract, if you will; about the work to be done. Many arborists have a basic format they use that spells out most of the standard details such as when the job will commence and end, exactly what will be done, how the cleanup will be handled, how stumps will be removed if a tree removal is done, and how much the **total job** will cost.

This last item is important, because you don't want any surprizes here. Work is usually priced one of two ways: (a) as a single price for the entire job, or (b) on an hourly basis plus materials. If you use the latter method, be sure to include a clause to include the wording,…." but not to exceed a total dollar amount of……."

Be sure to get what you want specified in the agreement, and don't be shy about asking questions about details. A competent arborist doesn't want any surprizes either, so make sure that both parties understand each other before any work begins.

Some friendly advice: it is usually best to hire an arborist who is based in your local community. They are there for the long haul, and they want to stay in business, so they want to assure that their reputation for being an honest business is known in the community. You might receive lower bids from services not based locally, and they may be completely legitimate and competent, but it is usually best to deal with folks who may be your neighbor, or is known by your friends, neighbors, or relatives as a "square shooter." Local firms are also easier to deal with when it comes down to the details of what you need done, and, if a dispute does occur, it is more likely to be settled amicably and fairly than if the company/individual doesn't reside in the local area.

If you are not familiar in how to write/develop simple agreements for tree work, it may be best to contact a consulting arborist or forester to do the first one for you, so you can see how it is done. The fee you pay may be well worth it, if you have a lot of trees on your property. Free advice may also be available from your local state forestry agency. Check it out.

Late Summer
Saturday, August 8th, 2009

As we enter the dog days of August, there is not a whole lot of tree care to do, or should be done, right now. Your trees should be left alone for a while, and only checked periodically to see if something is bothering them. The most important thing, right now, is to assure they have enough water, especially if they are newly planted and you are in a mini drouth situation. In a previous blog entry, guidelines were provided for deep watering, and this may need to be done for your tree(s). Still a word of caution: **Do Not Overwater!** It is tempting to water every day during an excessively dry period, but don't succumb to the temptation. Remember, overwatering can seriously inhibit the flow of oxygen to the root system; which, effectively, suffocates them. Damage to the roots results in damage to the above-ground parts of the tree, and could eventually cause the death of the tree way before it's natural life is over.

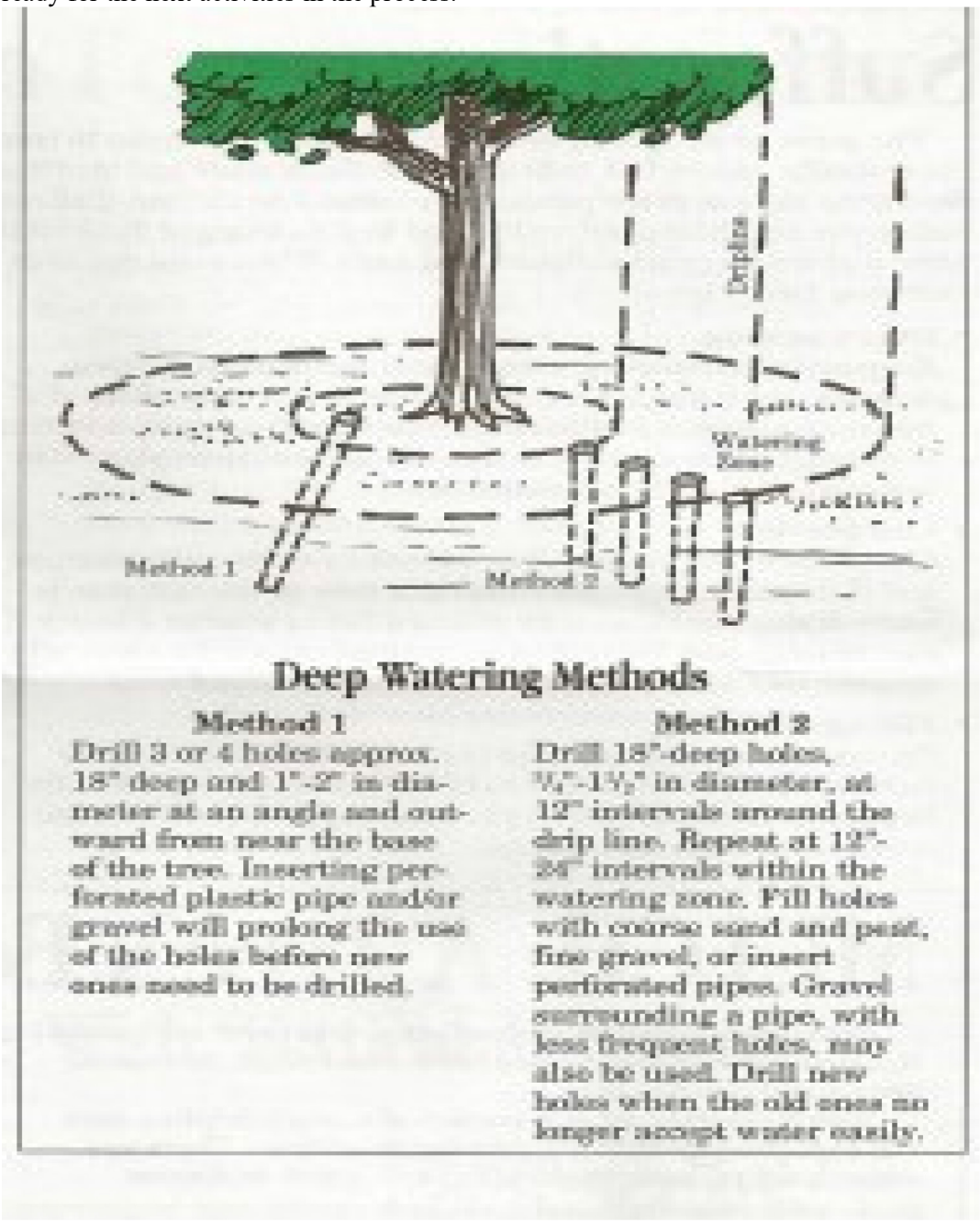
Watering should be enough, but not too much. The equivalent of about one-half inch of rain a week is a good rule of thumb for established trees. Of course, when it does rain, find out how much fell (rain gauges are cheap), so you can adjust any supplemental watering accordingly.

Insect attacks may become more evident in late summer, so it is good to look for any beastie that may be chomping on your leaves, or gnawing into or on the bark. If they are serious enough, you may need to contact a local arborist or nurseryman to find out what they are and how to control them. If the damage is relatively minor, you may only need to use a little elbow grease to pick the bugs by hand and send them to their demise. You don't always need to use chemicals to control a small colony of attackers.

Diseases may show up this time of year, and they will probably be a little more difficult to deal with. If you suspect disease damage, it is best to contact a professional to look into the situation. They are usually more adept at controlling the pathogens responsible, and some chemical control, beyond the average homeowners capability, is usually necessary.

Late summer is also a good time to assess what future pruning you may need to do when the weather is more suitable. Make notes, sketches, and write down ideas for individual trees and errant limbs and branches that you may need to visit later with the pruning saw or clippers. This inventory should help you get a better idea of how much time you will need to allot later on.

In general, late summer is a good time to sit back, take stock of where your tree management is, and get ready for the next activities in the process.



Thinking About Fall Planting?
Saturday, August 15th, 2009

As the summer draws to a close, many folks begin to think about what kind of tree(s) they might add to their landscape. Planting in the fall is a lot more popular than it should be (in my opinion), but that's not to say that it shouldn't be done. If done correctly, trees can be planted in the fall, and do very well, if proper aftercare is also provided. I guess, that after 50 years of experience, I have found that trees planted in late winter or early spring just seem to do better with regard to early establishment and growth. They are ready to jump out of the chute just as soon as the weather warms, whereas fall planted trees have to get ready to go into winter dormancy, and be prepared to sustain themselves through the vagaries of winter weather, before they can really start growing.

However, fall can be a good time to plant, if a few precautions are taken:

1. Don't plant too soon. Fall starts in late September and lasts until almost Christmas. Many species of native trees do not go dormant enough until early December, so planting before that time must be done carefully in order to prevent as much damage to the still growing root systems as possible. Using potted stock is usually best for fall planting since the damage to roots can be more easily controlled in the transplanting process.

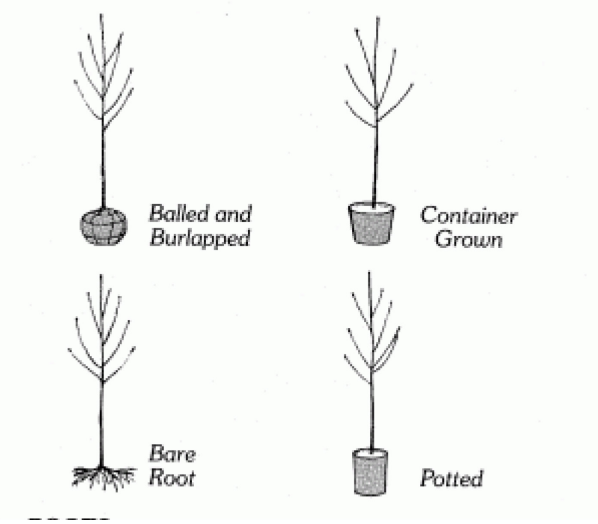
2. Avoid buying potted plants that have been held over the summer without proper mulching and watering. A container grown plant is usually a better choice, but make sure it, too, has been cared for properly over the summer. Check the plants for vigor, and always buy from the most reputable nurseryman you can find. Now is not the time to be planting a "bargain" found at a discount center. It'll cost you in the long run.

3. Provide stabilization for a taller tree such as a balled and burlapped speciman. Normally, this wouldn't be needed, but it is safer to provide bracing through the winter if the root system is not established or actively growing. Don't leave stakes or other guying materials over a year; most can be removed in the late spring following planting.

4. Mulch the newly planted tree; about 3-4 inches of mulch will usually suffice. This helps prevent frost heaving of the root system.

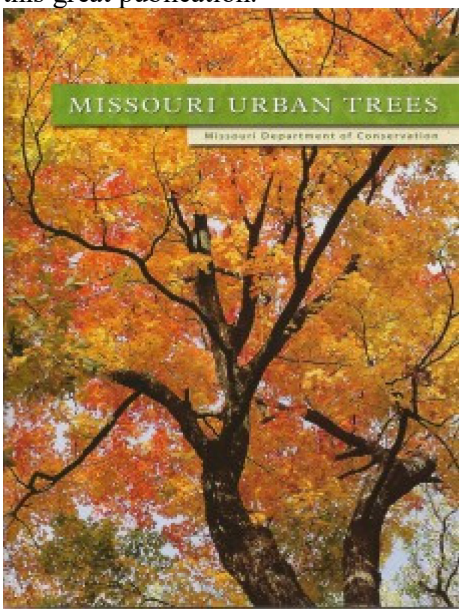
5. Make sure the tree is watered sufficiently, but avoid over-watering. Even though a tree has lost its leaves, it does not go completely dormant. Respiration still occurs and sufficient oxygen and moisture is needed for this vital function; even in deciduous trees. Coniferous trees also need sufficient moisture, not only to respire, but to take advantage of a warm winter day and actually grow a little bit.
So, if fall planting is your thing, keep these few ideas in mind, and, as always, do the best job of planting that you can. The goal is to have that new asset carried safely through the winter so it can jump out of the winter doldrums just as soon as possible in the spring. Good luck!

Planting Stock Types For fall Planting



Help Is On The Way
Saturday, August 22nd, 2009

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) has recently updated and published a new version of their very popular, and helpful, booklet: **MISSOURI URBAN TREES**. Pictured below is the cover of this great publication.

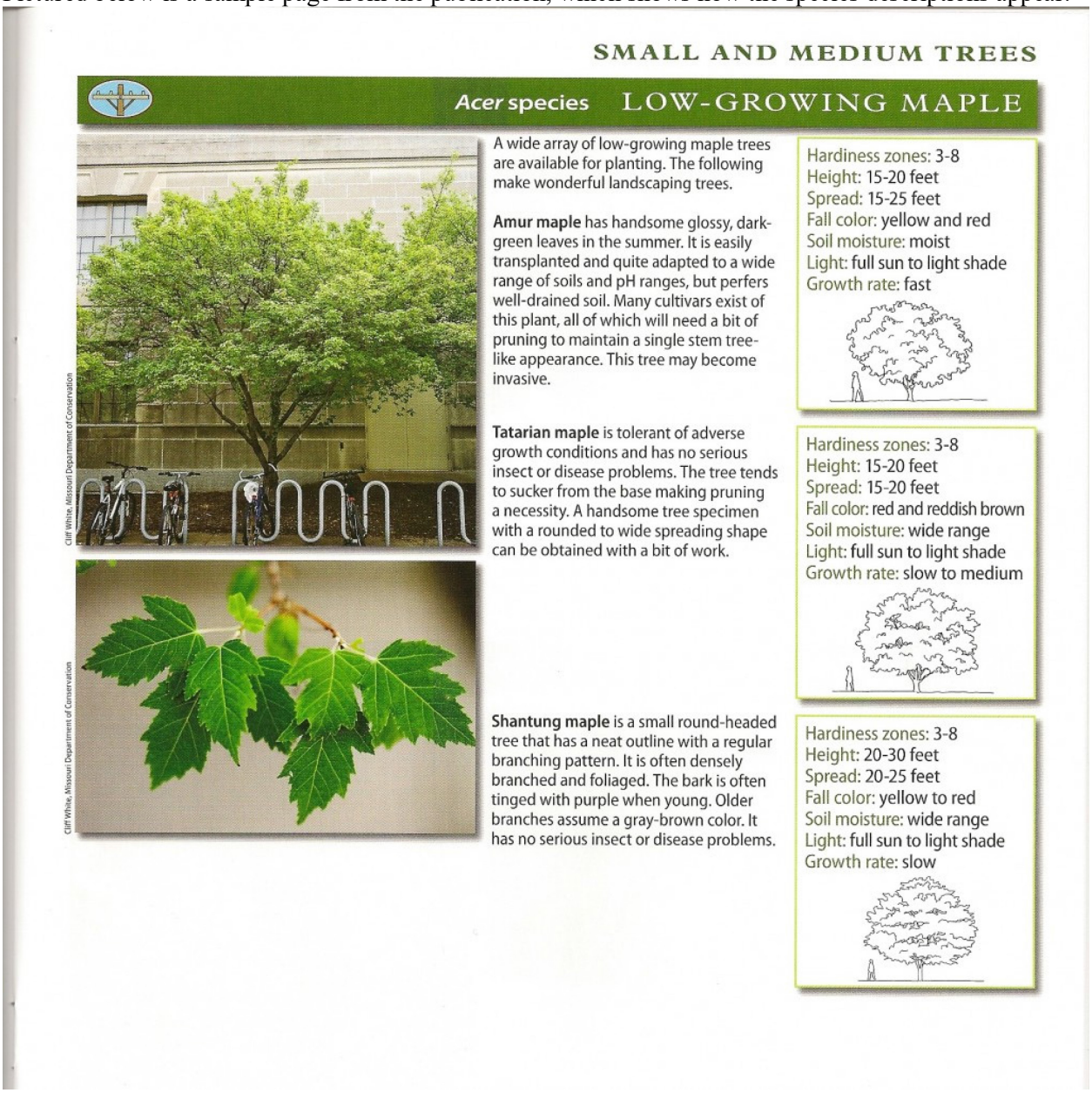


This 57 page booklet is chock full of useful information for those of you who need some help with managing your "urban forest." The color drawings and photographs are first rate, and, best of all, it's free! The Table of Contents gives a good idea of what is covered:

1. Choose the right tree for the right place.
2. Purchasing and transporting your tree.
3. Planting your tree.
4. Care of newly planted trees.
5. USDA hardiness zone map.

6. Tree species suitable for special conditions.
7. Recommended trees for Missouri landscapes.
8. Undesirable trees for landscape planting
9. Summary of tree characteristics.
10. Species index.
11. Glossary.
12. References.

Yessir, with this booklet as a reference, you can get off on the right track in establishing and caring for new tree plantings. I recommend it highly. To obtain a copy, contact your nearest MDC office, or look on-line at www.missouri conservation.org, where you'll find links that tell you how to order publications. Pictured below is a sample page from the publication, which shows how the species descriptions appear.



SMALL AND MEDIUM TREES

Acer species LOW-GROWING MAPLE

Cliff White, Missouri Department of Conservation

A wide array of low-growing maple trees are available for planting. The following make wonderful landscaping trees.

Amur maple has handsome glossy, dark-green leaves in the summer. It is easily transplanted and quite adapted to a wide range of soils and pH ranges, but perfers well-drained soil. Many cultivars exist of this plant, all of which will need a bit of pruning to maintain a single stem tree-like appearance. This tree may become invasive.

Hardiness zones: 3-8
Height: 15-20 feet
Spread: 15-25 feet
Fall color: yellow and red
Soil moisture: moist
Light: full sun to light shade
Growth rate: fast

Cliff White, Missouri Department of Conservation

Tatarian maple is tolerant of adverse growth conditions and has no serious insect or disease problems. The tree tends to sucker from the base making pruning a necessity. A handsome tree specimen with a rounded to wide spreading shape can be obtained with a bit of work.

Hardiness zones: 3-8
Height: 15-20 feet
Spread: 15-20 feet
Fall color: red and reddish brown
Soil moisture: wide range
Light: full sun to light shade
Growth rate: slow to medium

Shantung maple is a small round-headed tree that has a neat outline with a regular branching pattern. It is often densely branched and foliaged. The bark is often tinged with purple when young. Older branches assume a gray-brown color. It has no serious insect or disease problems.

Hardiness zones: 3-8
Height: 20-30 feet
Spread: 20-25 feet
Fall color: yellow to red
Soil moisture: wide range
Light: full sun to light shade
Growth rate: slow

Natural Regeneration
Saturday, August 29th, 2009

Every now and then, a homeowner may see some sort of woody "sprout" growing in their yard, flower bed, or some other out of the way place that doesn't get mowed regularly. Many wonder what that plant is, and then assume it's a weed, so they pull it or grub it out of the way. Unfortunately, we may be missing an opportunity to let the "sprout" grow into a valuable asset for our landscape —— particularly if it's growing in a spot that could use a tree. Foresters call these plants natural regeneration, and they may have come from a very desirable species, such as an oak. Of course, it more often comes from a more prolific, undesirable species such as silver maple or Siberian elm. Then it is truly a "weed," and needs to be removed.

For those of you who don't know the difference, here is some help: a weed is simply a plant that is out of place. It's much the same as the difference between soil and dirt; i.e. dirt is soil that's out of place. We all should know by now that all plants, regardless of species, are valuable within their natural setting. Thus, a silver maple growing in the woods down by the creek serves a very useful purpose in protecting the stream corridor, providing wildlife habitat, etc. Growing in your front yard, however, the silver maple can cause a great deal of consternation and expense. Something better should be in your yard.

Anyway, I digress.

If you find a woody sprout in a desirable spot for a tree, I encourage you to find out if it is a desirable species for that spot. This may take some technical assistance if you are not familiar with identifying trees that are only a few inches tall, and have only 2 or 3 leaves. Try to get it identified without removing any of the leaves. I'd recommend leaving it for a year or so, until it is a little larger, in order to determine what it is. You can always remove it later, with little hassle, if it turns out to be a "weed."

Taking advantage of naturally-occuring seedlings can be a good strategy for managing your landscape, if they meet the criteria of the "right tree, right place" approach. Of course, I do not recommend keeping even a good species in your spouses favorite day lilly bed. But, then again, you might be able to transplant that good old white oak, or red oak seedling to that spot along the back fence where you've been contemplating filling in with "something." If the local squirrels buried the acorn, then forgot about it, the resulting little oak tree may be just the thing for your landscape, since it's one of the locals too. Best of all, it's also free!

Give natural regeneration a try, when you get the opportunity.