

Archive for December, 2011

Some Random Thoughts

Friday, December 9th, 2011

Winter is a good time to plan for spring tree care activities – it is less hectic than waiting to do it in the “heat” of the busy season in the spring. Planning ahead is a good thing.

Plant native species whenever possible, and avoid planting invasive, non-native species at all costs. Invasives crowd out native plants and generate all sorts of problems for a home landscape, not to mention possible endangerment of a whole neighborhood or community landscape.

Some non-native trees are acceptable in the urban environment, but check them out carefully, with information from experts, before investing time and money. One of my favorites is the Japanese Zelkova. Zelkova is closely related to the elms, but is resistant to Dutch elm disease, and does not have many unfavorable attributes such as invasiveness. It has good pollution, wind, and drought tolerance. Leaves are dark green and held late into the fall; but they do not have very good fall color. Zelkova has a nice vase-like shape, with a high branching habit, making it useful where low branching is undesirable. Japanese Zelkova; give it a looksee.

Some native trees are undesirable in urban situations: cottonwood, silver maple, boxelder, catalpa, black locust, mulberries, white and green ash, Osage orange, paw paw, and persimmon do not make good yard trees. Even black walnut (our most valuable timber tree) does not make for a good yard tree, but may be OK in a landscape situation where mowing is not required and nut production is desired.

A fast growing tree is not always the best choice. Remember: A tree that grows fast, goes downhill fast. Longer lived trees, with a moderate growth rate are usually the best choice for the long haul.

Make a list now, of things to do in the spring, and prioritize them. Write them down and pin them on a bulletin board or post on the fridge. Don't let your list get buried under the kid's “masterpieces.”

Want to expand your interest in trees beyond your home landscape? There are many opportunities for community involvement in tree care. Contact your local tree board or community volunteer coordinator (if you have one) to learn who to contact. Or, contact us through the MCFC website; or contact a forester at a local Conservation Department office. There are lots of ways to get involved. You can even e-mail me (as noted below), and I'll try to steer you to someone in your locale who can help you get involved.

Myths About Trees

Wednesday, December 14th, 2011

A myth is defined as, “a traditional story serving to explain some phenomenon, custom, etc.” Another dictionary definition (and the one I like better) is, “any fictitious story, person, or thing.” In the world of trees, there are many myths. These include the idea that root systems are a deep, mirror image of the tree's trunk and limbs. Another is that limbs move upward as the tree gains height.

Once we learn the truth, we find that roots spread laterally and not too far beneath the surface, but often further than the tree is tall. And we discover that a low limb is always a low limb, and if it is not pruned at an early age, it will still be a low limb – and probably troublesome – when the tree is large.

When myths are vanquished, we can more clearly see ways to protect and manage the well-being of our community trees. Over the next several entries in this forum, I'll talk about some of the more common myths about trees, and what can be done to overcome them, with the objective of promoting new ways of thinking about tree care and hopefully stimulate new solutions to some old problems.

I'll try to talk about a different myth every week to ten days, so tune in whenever you can, or pick them up in the archives, if you get sidetracked by holiday commitments and other outside distractions. I hope I can keep from being distracted. For now, I'll leave you with a tidbit to chew on: Most trees do not have a long, deep tap root that anchors it in place. There are usually some roots whose primary function is anchorage, and they may grow slightly deeper into the soil than feeder roots, but they do not grow out of the soil zone where oxygen exchange is inhibited (usually deeper than 2-3 feet depending on soil type).

Hey! That's My Tree!

Tuesday, December 20th, 2011

Have you ever looked out your window and seen the city forestry crew working on a tree near the street that you believe to be yours? Don't get too excited, because the tree may not really be your responsibility, even if you planted it. There is often confusion about who is responsible for streetside trees, and this confusion can be quite confounding depending on the situation in each community. Suffice it to say that it varies from place to place. Despite the differences between communities, it is generally accepted that trees standing on public rights-of-way are the responsibility of the city, town, or other entity that holds the right of way. In some communities, the responsibility is sometimes relinquished in favor of the adjoining landowner through a cooperative agreement between the city and landowner.

Knowing your responsibility for streetside trees is important for determining:

1. Who should prune and care for the tree.
2. Who is liable if lack of care causes an accident or damage to another's person or property.
3. Who pays for tree work or removal.
4. How removal of trees can be controlled.
5. How the malpractice of topping can legally be stopped.

The aspect of liability is particularly critical. I've heard city foresters recite stories about how the supposed ownership of a streetside tree varies depending on the circumstances they encounter. Paraphrasing this problem always comes out something like this, "If there's no problem, an irate homeowner doesn't want us to do any pruning or care on 'their' tree, even if it's on the right of way, so they complain to our bosses, or the city councilman. But, if a limb falls on somebody's car, that same landowner, all of a sudden, says the tree belongs to the city, and why didn't those so and so's take care of it." So it is important to understand all of the responsibilities that come from claiming ownership of a streetside tree. It needs to be clarified right from the start.

If you have a streetside tree, and have any question concerning ownership/responsibility for that tree, I encourage you to get the issue clarified as soon as possible by reviewing your community's tree ordinance or engineering records, or asking municipal staff. Once responsibility is understood by both parties, the job of caring for the tree to make it an asset for both the homeowner and community can proceed, without any consternation interfering with the care "your" tree deserves.

Bad Tree !!!!

Thursday, December 29th, 2011

Trees get accused of doing all sorts of bad things. They are innocent. Trees do not have any intention of doing such things as falling on cars or roofs, or even spewing debris all over your sidewalk or driveway or in your house's drain gutters. Actually, trees have no intentions at all; they simply stand there and grow. It is humans who place sidewalks under them, or park their cars under overhanging limbs, and it is humans who are responsible for keeping trees healthy and preventing or detecting hazards.

A bus driver accuses a tree of hitting his bus with a low hanging limb. Nasty tree. Did it just jump out and give his precious bus a smack in the kisser, or did he drive his bus into the limb? The tree was just standing there doing it's natural thing; growing. It couldn't move out of the way of the *moving bus* that was being driven by a human being. Admittedly, someone would have dropped the ball in caring for the tree, or else the limb would not have drooped below about 14 feet above the street, and even the most unwary bus could have passed under it unscathed.

Properly managed trees should cause no major headaches for homeowners and/or motorists. There would not be any more damage reports such as a policeman made in an unnamed west coast state; "Damages were done to a car hit by a southbound tree!"

I wonder how fast the tree was going? It must have been headed south for the winter.....

They just stand there folks!