

JOURNAL OF ARBORICULTURE

March 1979
Vol. 5, No. 3

HAVE YOU REALLY LOOKED AT TREES?¹

by Clarence E. Lewis

When you enter Bellingrath Gardens at Mobile, Alabama, the following immediately attracts your attention: "Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints, kill nothing but time," and this we should abide by. We are going to concern ourselves only with trees like this beautiful fernleaved beech, *Fagus sylvatica* 'Asplenifolia'.

Flowers first come to mind, as we begin to observe trees, and one of the most brilliant in mid spring is the ruby red horse-chestnut, *Aesculus x carnea*, 'Briotii', with its erect 8 to 10 inch scarlet flower clusters. But, we should look for those trees whose flowers appear in late May, June and July. The Siebold, or Oyama magnolia, *Magnolia sieboldii*, with its pure white petals and scarlet stamens appear by early June, followed, or at the same time, by the large, white flowered and leaved Fraser magnolia. Viewed from beneath, these flowers often appear as in a painting. Yellowwood, or virgilia, *Cladrastis lutea*, with its white chain-like, fragrant flowers attracts anyone, and, already beginning to unfold its bracts, is the Japanese or Kousa dogwood. The latter is one of the best of the oriental small trees ever introduced into this country. As we continue into late June, and then July, *Stewartia pseudocamellia*, with its tissue-like white petals, and orange stamens, puts on a constant display for 4 or more weeks, and July finds the golden-rain tree, or varnish tree, *Koelreuteria paniculata*, demanding your attention, and getting it, with large yellow flower clusters. So, there are many small trees with flowers, but these are some of the best.

Little attention do we pay to the erect purplish-red pistillate cone-like flowers of Norway spruce, *Picea abies*, or the small, drooping purplish staminate flowers at the ends of branches. Even-

tually, of course, the erect cones turn brown and become pendulous.

The maple fruits are slighted by too many, and we should notice the bright red samaras, or winged fruits of the Amur maple, *Acer ginnala*, but, more so, the much longer lasting, and just as colorful, fruits of the Tatarian maple, *Acer tataricum*. Even the American hop hornbeam, with its hanging hop-like fruits, can make an interesting subject when viewed against a green background.

Fall color brings parades of people to the northern states, and to the higher elevations of the more southerly. Not long lasting is the bright red amur maple, and the very brilliant red maple. Pepperidge or sourgum, *Nyssa sylvatica*, reflects its bright red leaves in a nearby stream or pond, and sweetgum, *Liquidambar styraciflua*, can be ranked among the leaders, with truly brilliant reds, sometimes with a little purple or yellow in the foliage. If you are in the Pacific northwest, the vine maple, *Acer circinatum*, adds splashes of bright red to the countryside.

Now, let's look at foliage, but not straight on. Get beneath a trident maple, *Acer buergerianum*, and observe the artistry of a single hanging leaf, or do the same with a Japanese hornbeam, and let the sunlight itemize each vein. The wind catches the finely cut leaves of *Alnus glutinosa*, 'Incisa', and seems to almost take you with them. Purple beech leaves are always colorful, particularly with rain drops on them.

Now, look upward again, to the arrangement of the grass-like leaves of golden larch, *Pseudolarix kaempferi*. They are on curved spurs, and at certain times, particularly in early fall, the golden foliage and its arrangement is most artistic. The delicate overhead canopy of the silk tree, *Albizia*

¹Presented at the annual meeting of the International Society of Arboriculture in Toronto, Ontario in August 1978.

julibrissin, is fascinating, too, and the honeylocust, *Gleditsia triacanthos*, has an intriguing umbrella. High above you will find the black stems of Kentucky coffee tree, weaving patterns through the mirage of leaves. Not to be left out are the golden-rain tree, *Koelreuteria paniculata*, with divided compound leaves, and the fine textured Japanese pagoda tree, *Sophora japonica*, and, certainly, let's not forget *Ginkgo*.

Bark has its place in the picture presentation. Some small trees like paperbark maple and Japanese stewartia are colorful 365 days of the year. There are barks which curl, others flake, and the sweet gum, *Liquidambar styraciflua*, has a corky bark that gives a rugged appearance to the tree. So, there are all kinds of barks on display.

Tree forms are the basis of a landscape architect making tree selections to complement a home, mall, park or a building complex. A picturesque eastern white pine, *Pinus strobus*, a flat topped dotted thorn, *Crataegus punctata*, the pyramidal oriental spruce, and the delicate threadleaf Japanese maple, *Acer palmatum* 'Dissectum', are all part of his brush with which he paints his pictures.

The weeping silver linden, *Tilia petiolaris*, is a graceful large tree, carrying its branches to the ground, and screening a magnificent divided trunk. Another pendent type in the large tree class is the weeping beech, *Fagus sylvatica* 'Pendulata', with curving, twisting branches that tumble ever downward. Those with lesser heights are the pendent purple beech, *Fagus sylvatica* 'Purpurea Pendula', and the magnificent weeping hemlock, *Tsuga canadensis* 'Pendula', the latter of which is a beautiful fountain of green. Others become noticeable in their outlines — like the narrow, pyramidal dawn redwood, *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, the round headed, large red oak, *Quercus rubra*, and purple beech, *Fagus sylvatica* 'Atropunicea'.

There is the reverse form where the branches reach upward and more or less parallel the main trunk. One of the best known in this class is the columnar beech, *Fagus sylvatica* 'Fastigiata', which can make a fair height — say, 50 feet — and a beautiful tall hedge or screen.

So, the forms are many and varied, and a con-

cluding suggestion is the dense, squatty, billowy dwarf white pine, *Pinus strobus* 'Densa', (formerly 'Nana').

Stems should be studied, and the trunks of trees. The latter become animalistic in the mature Norway spruce, *Picea abies*. Overhead the dark lateral branches of a live oak, *Quercus virginiana*, twist and turn to create unusual overhead patterns against the sky. Nearer the eye is an irregular, vertical series of structures created by a tangled row of paper birch, *Betula papyrifera*, or an organized row of single stemmed American hornbeams, *Carpinus caroliniana*. A line of red pines, *Pinus resinosa*, seen by the light of early morning, and later in the day, the leaning trunks of live oak, all become part of intriguing tree trunks.

The massive trunks of rows of large European or American beech catch and hold the eye, and then just to walk underneath one of these great living structures and to photograph the clean, wrinkled and smooth gray bark is a great thrill in itself.

Sometimes we are shown too much in the landscape. Just a glimpse of a tree that is different from nearby shrubs and trees attracts and suggests that you pursue it further. The white bark of a birch does this, and so do many other parts of nature, like a curved branch, an unusual form or a fine or coarse textured foliage that is different from its associates.

Trunks frame views, and by looking between them to the distant scene, we find it more fascinating. Water helps, too.

We get to the tenacity of trees as we view Canada hemlock, *Tsuga canadensis*, growing out of what appears to be sheer rock, or the Jeffrey pine, *Pinus jeffreyi*, at Glacier Point in California. We can't help but wonder how did they start, and what keeps them going.

We marvel more, as we find an old katsura tree, *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*, and an equally old cedar of Lebanon, *Cedrus libani*, holding their branches at greath lengths in this display of strength.

So, do we really look at trees, and do we see all that is there for us to appreciate? Do we, really?

Professor Emeritus
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan