

Features

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Branching Out

John Johnston

When it comes to trees, our industry has strong and deep roots. The very first Arbor Day took place on April 10, 1872, in Nebraska. In the early days, local city tree councils often fostered municipal plantings.

Today, these mature trees continue to make headlines. In 2012, more than 48,000 trees in New Jersey were removed or trimmed following Hurricane Sandy. In the years since, few of these trees have been replaced, their absence noticeable in the landscape. Other mature trees have grown brittle from the lack of moisture and food uptake, while some have succumbed to disease and non-indigenous insects like the Asian long-horned beetle (ALB) and the emerald ash borer (EAB).

Our industry must bring awareness to the importance of future plantings and the positive impact of trees on our environment. With fall soon upon us, now is the best time to plant a tree. The ground is workable or loose. The conditions are favorable for warm, sunny days and cooler nights. Moisture uptake is reduced as the ambient temperatures lower.

Breathe Easy

Let's review just a few of the benefits, according to the Arbor Day Foundation:

- "A mature leafy tree produces as much oxygen in a season as 10 people inhale in a year."
- "One acre of trees annually consumes the amount of carbon dioxide equivalent to that produced by driving an average car for 26,000 miles."

Trees—or, rather, the shade they provide—also help homeowners reduce energy costs in the summer months and improve the quality of outdoor living spaces.

Simple Steps

Success begins with planting. Most planting failures happen because trees are planted incorrectly or they're unable to adequately expand their root systems in the soil. Some garden centers offer tree-planting services to customers, either for free or at a modest upcharge. If your customer intends to plant on his or her own, educate them on proper planting techniques, including height of the root ball, removing the binding twine around the trunk and watering.

Maintaining growth is key to the survival of any tree planting. Once planting is complete, food, water, uptake, proper pruning and yearly visual inspections of bark and leaves are all that's needed to ensure years of growth.

Species of endo- and ecto-mycorrhizae are special additives offered in many of today's soil and fertilizer products to help root systems expand and flourish, even in poor soils. Consumers may need some encouragement to use a great "success" product even if the name is difficult to spell or pronounce.

Going... Going... Gone

Common problems among deciduous trees are sun scold from damaged bark, anthracnose common to maple and oak, and visible insect issues like gypsy moth, tent caterpillar and mimosa webworm that eat leaf surfaces.

According to the USDA, the ALB is one of the more devastating insects we've ever seen. If a tree is diagnosed with this insect, it's eradicated by removal of the tree no matter how significant it may be.

Since the ALB came onto the scene in the 1990s, we've also seen the devastation of the EAB, which drills into the pith of the tree, lays eggs and destroys the tree's nutritional uptake. The loss of thousands of ash trees is alarming; the swath from the Midwest is heading eastward and is unrelenting.

Thankfully, the U.S. has become more vigilant in its inspections of overseas imports, including decorative woods from China used in Christmas décor.

Planting for the Future

Our future tree sales depend more than ever on our garden centers that specialize in selling hardwood, and fruit and decorative trees to the public. With your help, consumers can have the knowledge and experience (and warranty) to reap decades of enjoyment from the initial planting. Plant a tree and breathe easier! **GP**

John Johnston is Retail Education Manager for Griffin. He can be reached at jjohnston@griffinmail.com.