

# WILD THINGS

## Book aids in picking best tree

With dramatic swiftness, fall is upon us. Suddenly, days are shorter, and nights have taken on a crispness that begs for a bonfire. Autumn is one of my favorite seasons. Its biggest downfall is ragweed, with pollen shaped like a medieval mace that mercilessly pummels sinuses. But who would blame the entire season for the evil weed?

Fall is a marvelous time to plant trees and shrubs. Lower temperatures and generous rainfall usually give plants a chance to settle in.

One book that might help guide homeowners through a selection process is *Desirable Trees for the Midwest: 50 for the Home Landscape and Larger Properties* (\$29.95).

Scott A. Zanon, an Upper Arlington horticulturist turned author, recently published the slim but information-packed volume.

Zanon, who was tapped in 2003 to help with the restoration of Ohio State University's Scarlet Golf Course, said he found little written about desirable trees.

Homeowners who can get past the book's frequent references to golf — "Avoid planting trees on the east or south sides of tees and greens," for example — will find the book valuable.

It offers a quick assessment of each of the 50 trees Zanon deems spade-worthy, including information about the tree's growth rate, flowers, fruit, fall color, disease problems and more.

Especially useful are photos (five for each of the 50 descriptions) showing the trees in various stages.

The red oak page, for example, depicts the tree bedecked in green in summer, in red leaf in fall and in snow in winter. It also has close-ups of leaves and acorns.

"If you are going to spend \$150 or \$200 on a tree," Zanon said, "you want to know what it's going to look like."

Most reference sources typically offer a single photo — say, of the tree in bloom or in high fall color. But how does it look the rest of the year?

Homeowners who plan to plant a tree this fall should start making decisions before heading to the nursery.

Two questions should take precedence:

- What are the conditions of the site where the tree is to be planted? (In full sun? Close to the house? Near power lines?)

Choose a tree suited for the location. (If the tree will be in full sun, select a species happy with unfiltered rays; if it will be near power lines, make sure it will stay small — less than 25 feet tall; and so forth.)

- What is the purpose of a tree in that spot?

"A person has to realize what they want that tree for," Zanon said. "Do they want it for shade? Do they want it for flowers in spring? Do they want a deciduous tree? Do they want an evergreen?"

Zanon is high on several native trees, although his recommendations extend beyond indigenous species. He does recommend a number of natives, though, including some that are underused:

- Yellow buckeye (*Aesculus flava*), growing up to 75 feet tall, bears striking yellow flowers in May. Along with the red buckeye, it is superior to the Ohio buckeye, which tends to lose its leaves in the heat of summer.
- White fringe tree (*Chionanthus virginicus*), a slowgrowing tree, reaches 20 feet at maturity. Fragrant white flowers emerge in spring, and female trees might bear blue fruit in fall if flowers are pollinated.
- Sweet bay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*), growing to 20 feet tall, bears lemon-scented blossoms in spring.

- Red oak, a medium to fast grower, can hit 75 feet tall. Its spring catkins, the tree's flowers, can go unnoticed, but its acorns will draw in wildlife.

Desirable Trees also includes a section on trees he didn't recommend. Ohio buckeye? That leaf-loss issue. American sycamore? Its tendency to pick up a fungus in spring. Saucer magnolia? Occasional flower loss from spring freezes.

The book is a solid reference source, despite my main complaints: Zanon's inconsistencies in noting whether a tree is native to the United States and whether it has invasive tendencies.

Although Callery pear is among trees he would not recommend, Zanon rules it out because of how often it splits in windstorms. He fails to note that it's considered invasive in Ohio. Ditto with the Norway maple, a tree he rules out because grass is difficult to grow under it.

Zanon's book is sold for \$29.95 through his Web site, [www.desirabletrees.com](http://www.desirabletrees.com).

Similar information is offered at Ohio State University's Plant Facts Web site ([plantfacts.osu.edu/plantlist](http://plantfacts.osu.edu/plantlist)) — a list that covers perennials, shrubs, vines, annuals, bulbs and more.

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