

GROWING MATTERS

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*Proudly serving northern gardeners
since 1982*

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News Briefs

Manitoba continues to open up its business with new rules concerning COVID-19.

Congratulations to Andrew and Georgia Ronald on the birth of a son Cole on July 2nd.

Our 2020 Guide and Price List are online. Use password: xxxxxxxx to access protected files.

From the President

This past spring season will be a year to remember for growers and retailers. Production and sales by independent garden centres have exceeded early spring forecasts as homeowners have stayed home and made improvements to their landscapes. Inventory of annuals, hanging baskets and planters have generally sold out in our region. Thus out of much uncertainty our businesses have been sustained while others in the hospitality, travel, and many other service sectors have struggled and may suffer decline for several months or even a year or more due to Covid 19. The fact that gardening and landscaping can be carried out with lots of spacing and often with singular purpose has made it enjoyable to many who have felt house bound and isolated inside.

While we have been behind in our production cycles this spring due to late shipping and a downsized workforce we have moved valiantly to try to catch up. We have been operating with 10 of our normal 15 foreign farm workers and have sought to hire local youth with moderate success. All I can say is that it is hard to compete with government handouts in the highly subsidized social network that has developed at least in Canada. With sanitation and social distancing we have fortunately not had any health issues, in fact, to our knowledge this has been so throughout our local industry. With a few staff in the 60 plus age and a couple of us in the 70 plus category, we are thankful for the health we enjoy. Locally in Manitoba we have one of the lowest infection rates in our nation and this has allowed early lifting of restrictions.

We are again appreciative for the support of our customers and for the good restocking orders that are continuing to be placed. We have had strong orders for several of our Northern Garden new plant introductions including Little Lady lilac, new potentilla, Guardian aspen, Columnar flowering crabapples, Parkland Pillar columnar birch, Iceberg Alley dwarf willow and our latest Pinktini lilac. Some other excellent plants we carry such as Sundancer poplar, Ming cherry and Gladiator flowering crabapples and Silver Cloud maples also have sold well. This past winter our sugar maples wintered well and this species and its cultivars are now developing good acceptance throughout our northern zones. It is a joy to see some of these new plants becoming garden favourites.

As I close it is with the desire that we all continue to appreciate the wonderful people that help us pull through difficult times and the overwhelming spring workload that marks the industry. As well, to our health care workers, we also say a thank you for the dedication they have demonstrated through the past months of this pandemic.

Wilbert Ronald



Out of the Ashes - Silver Maple

by Andrew Ronald

This article is a part of an ongoing series highlighting alternate trees to Ash for use in the Prairies in light of the threat of Emerald Ash Borer.

One of the major limitations with many of the substitute species to ash is their adaptability to the difficult conditions experienced at commercial sites and on the boulevard. There is only a short list of trees for the northern zones that will not only survive but thrive in compacted soils and outlast droughts and urban pollution - Silver Maple is near the top of that list.

In favorable sites, Silver Maple grows quickly into a large shade tree (50-60 ft high, 30-40 ft wide) with an upright, oval crown. Leaves are maple-shaped and an attractive green colour with a silvery underside during the summer and turn yellow in the fall. Branches are a brick red colour in contrast to the trunk which is grey and smooth on young trees but becomes rough and shaggy with age.

Silver Maple prefers to grow in full sunlight and in moist, well-drained soils but is tolerant of occasional drought, wet sites, alkaline and clay soils - characteristics of many prairie planting sites. One of the knocks against Silver Maple is that it is susceptible to damage from high winds and ice. This can be addressed with more frequent pruning to develop trees with a central leader and good branch structure. Silver Maple survival from field-grown trees is best when trees are spring dug. Fall moving needs to be done late in the season to be successful.

Provenance is important with seedling Silver Maple as this species is native over a broad range of eastern North America (zones 3-9). Northern-limit seedling Silver Maple is best adapted for use on the Prairies. 'Silver Cloud' is the best known cultivar, a male selection chosen for its upright crown, symmetrical branching and improved cold hardiness.



What's the New Normal?

by Amy Cleland

Operating amidst the COVID-19 pandemic brought a lot of uncertainty to start, very quickly followed by record sales for most. This pandemic forced us all into a new way of thinking about how we operate and how we market our products. The power of social media became very clear but also the hurdle of how do you sell a plant without the ability of the customer seeing it in person? The volume of sales this industry does in such a short period of time can be a challenge in normal years, and this has been far from a normal year. This poses a question for the future... what is the new normal?

There are a lot of questions we all have as we start thinking about next year.

How will you operate your business going forward? What new practices/changes will you keep next year? The general sense I've been getting is that most were happy with slightly reduced hours. It allowed for stress-free maintenance and cleaning before or after customers were allowed in. Lineups and "traffic control" were pretty hit and miss.

What do you plan for product next year? This question has come up a lot - do you plant/order more or leave numbers the same? Provided we are no longer in a state of emergency I think we can expect most customers will return to their previous buying habits. There may continue to be a rise in edible plants as I think consumers are more aware of self-sustainability, but this was also a trend before the pandemic. However, I do expect that some of the new gardeners who were "forced" into trying it this year will continue coming back because they found unexpected enjoyment or fulfillment from their garden.

The new normal remains to be seen, but we need to continue asking these questions and coming up with possibilities. This year has been a tough one but I think we are all coming out of it quite positive and having learned a lot.

