

# GROWING MATTERS

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since 1982*

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## News Briefs

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



Storm damage on pyramidal cedar in Winnipeg - October 2019

## From the President

This newsletter is a couple weeks late as we planned to combine it with the price list mail-out which you are also receiving. Weather wise, September and October have been very different from the summer months. As noted in our July newsletter the summer months were record dry, but since September we have moved to record moisture. We put away our irrigation and watering tanks and prayed for drier weather to enable our bare-root tree harvest. This better weather has finally come as I write at the end of October and we have been able to complete most of the harvest from October 22<sup>nd</sup> onward.

A severe, pre-winter blizzard (October 15<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup>) deposited over a foot of wet snow and almost looked like a season-ending event. It broke some nursery trees, but caused the most damage to residential and municipal stock. Trees with heavy fruit set ('Pink Spires' flowering crabapple), heavy seed set (Green ash) or late-maturing foliage ('Hot Wings' maple) suffered the most. There has been severe damage to our electrical grid and personally we endured 3 to 4 days of power interruption. Thanks to long hours on the part of Manitoba Hydro and with help from neighbouring utilities in ON., SK., and our friends in MN., power has been mostly restored. These weather events make us all aware of how dependent we are on electrical power and communications.

With the heavy losses to nursery and urban trees we see a tighter tree market developing in the near term. Ash (*Fraxinus*), which used to represent 30-40% of tree sales has dropped to less than 2%, leaving a big gap to fill. Alternative trees take time to grow and must be "northern hardy" so are not easily replaced from other regions. It will take time to rebuild stock levels especially in the larger caliper sizes. Our recently distributed wholesale catalogue, addresses tree diversity by listing a number of species alternatives for ash. Diversification will take several years and must be promoted by growers, designers and landscape professionals. All of us must lend our support.

We are seeing a nice interest in a number of new plant introductions that have been promoted by our company. The 'Guardian' aspen, resistant to bronze leaf disease, continues to have wider acceptance. 'Sundancer' hybrid poplar sales are passing the former favourite 'Prairie Sky' and the newer 'Ming' and 'Klondike' cherries are winning praise as small trees. 'Green Wall' and 'Midnite Spire' columnar flowering crabapples will impress you as superlative introductions for landscaping in small spaces. Our two newly released potentilla cultivars: 'Marmalade' and 'Mandarin Tango' as well as the 'Little Lady' lilac have been well received. Finally, we expect the newly introduced 'Pinktini' ['Miss Canada' x 'Charisma'] will wonderfully fill the need for a compact, non-suckering, late-blooming Preston lilac.

Over the next months we will see a number of you at the regional prairie trade shows and we look forward to a visit. Hopefully all of us can look back on a good but difficult year!

Wilbert Ronald

# Out of the Ashes - Amur Cherry

by Andrew Ronald



In the search for trees to take the place of Ash in home landscapes and commercial plantings where space is often limited, Amur cherry (*Prunus maackii*) is one of the better options. This zone 2 hardy species grows in an upright rounded form with a mature size of 25' high and 15' wide. The crown is dense and the orange-red, exfoliating bark and yellow fall colour are two of its notable ornamental features. While this species doesn't blossom as intensely as some of the other flowering cherries it does produce white flowers in spring and small black fruit in summer. The species prefers full sunlight and well-drained sites. It grows well in our alkaline soils, is drought tolerant once established and moderately tolerant of salt spray. Amur cherry is significantly more resistant to the black knot fungus than Common Chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*) or May Day (*Prunus padus* var. *commutata*).

Recent cultivar introductions have brought some renewed interest to this species. '**Klondike**' Amur Cherry is a Jeffries selection chosen for its superior crown form, more vigorous growth rate and improved winter hardiness over the species. It's trade name is derived from its golden-coloured, exfoliating bark. **Ming Hybrid Cherry** is a cross between *Prunus maackii* and *Prunus kerrassii* developed at the University of Saskatchewan. Recognized by some in the nursery trade for its ornamental potential, 'Ming' consistently produces balanced crowns and maintains a central leader. The bark is a dark burgundy color and trunks show high resistance to frost cracking. '**Goldspur**' is a dwarf selection of Amur Cherry discovered by Philip Ronald and introduced by Jeffries Nurseries. This cultivar grows more slowly than the species and has golden, exfoliating bark that is a desirable winter feature.

## A Wake-up Call for Non-Native Plants

by Phillip Ronald

All of our landscape plants develop winter hardiness over a number of months in fall through a process known as acclimation. The first stage of acclimation begins in late August and continues through September. Decreasing daylength across this period initiates leaf maturity and the formation of leaf abscission layers in deciduous plants. The result is brilliant fall colours, accompanied by leaf drop and bud dormancy.

However, many of our deciduous trees that have been introduced from other continents, show a limited or delayed response to shorter daylengths in zones 2 & 3. This list includes:

- Norway Maple - *Acer platanoides*
- Tatarian Maple - *Acer tataricum*
- Russian Olive - *Elaeagnus angustifolia*
- White Willow - *Salix alba*
- Siberian Elm - *Ulmus pumila*

The epic snowstorm that south-central Manitoba experienced in mid-October was a reality check for many of these non-native tree species. In the absence of leaf abscission, heavy wet snow adhered to their green foliage and placed a tremendous load on branches. Wind was the final enemy causing many overloaded branches and trunks to fail. Once the snow melted, extensive damage was visible with codominant trunks and poor branch angles being the most frequent sites of breakage.

Although our native tree species were largely exempt from heavy damage, there were a few exceptions. Peachleaf Willow and Manitoba Maple have notoriously brittle wood, and the storm ravaged many older trees. Bur Oak specimens with leaf retention paid a price for slow defoliation. Pyramidal forms of Eastern White Cedar were splayed open by the heavy snow load (see photo on page 1).

Storm damage reminds us of the critical importance of careful pruning for crown development, especially on juvenile trees. It also highlights the value of tree species that shut down early in autumn and are prepared for these unusual weather events.