

## **For Tree-Huggers – and the rest of us**

A tree may be nothing more than a plant with the special architecture that allows it to grow tall, but somehow we know that a tree is profoundly more than just a big plant. The tree's lignin permits it to outlast not just dry spells but centuries and perhaps it is this age that invokes our reverence.

Once upon a time when dinosaurs walked, there were trees and the trees outlasted the dinosaurs. Their descendents are of such impressive size they are considered mystical in many cultures. A Kauri (*Agathis australis*) of New Zealand's North Island actually has a name, Tane Mahuta, and is thought to be 1500 years old. Tane Mahuta is about 169 ft. tall. Before it was destroyed by fire there was an even older one, a Kauri called Kairaru possibly 4000 years old. So massive they are, it would be strange were they not considered sacred!

In our more sophisticated world we may be reluctant to admit that all of creation is sacred but even the most jaded of us experience the shock of guilt when we see swathes of the rain forest cleared. As your mom probably told you, "guilt is good – shape up!" Finally, we are paying attention and taking care of trees.

During the depression years before World War II the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was instituted during the FDR's first administration to provide jobs for young men. The CCC built roads and parks with shelters and picnic areas and planted three billion trees. In the 1930s it was jobs that were essential: the trees were a bonus but today they have become important.

Not all species of trees are right for all places and just as some places are best left treeless, some trees are best left unplanted. For example, the lovely willow if planted in a wetland can change a habitat for frogs and ducks into a woodland: some eucalyptus species can turn a merely dry area into a desert.

Currently scientists are finding that trees have a critical role in the struggle against global warming. Not only are trees essential for lumber, paper and as a source of pharmaceuticals but they have value in absorbing carbon, capturing large amounts of the CO<sub>2</sub> which is spewed into the atmosphere by our use of fossil fuels. Mentioning paper I am reminded that a few decades ago it was promised that computers would give us a paperless world. Did no one realize that where a computer went, a printer was sure to follow?

Lumber, too, is vital to our lives. Steel beams may have replaced wooden beams in major construction projects but at an ecological cost. The use of steel beams requires twelve times the energy input as the use of a corresponding wooden beam. In the past, forests have been protected because they harbored wildlife or helped keep our water clean. Increasingly they are important for the reservoirs of carbon they store in their soil.

New research has shown the greater the age of a forest, the greater its ability to absorb CO<sub>2</sub>. The results of this new research, using new scientific tools, have been contrary to what was expected. Conventional wisdom had held that an old forest had diminished capacity for carbon sequestration. New findings are sponsoring the hope that the life cycle of commercial plantings can be extended by a decade or more.

### **NEW ROSE CHALLENGE**

According to Master Gardener Debbie Bartok-Newton a rarely seen rose ailment has appeared in Gloucester. Her deft research on the web identifies it as Rose Rosette and it is due to an infestation by mites. The ailing cane was a dark burgundy red with large numbers of soft and rubbery prickles. This is a virus/disease

that is not very common and it needs to be caught early or the entire bush will die. Unfortunately most mitecides are not effective in killing it.

If you see an infected cane, bag it, cut as close to the base as possible, and take it to the dump. Do not put it in the compost or recycle it. Any entire bush that is affected has to be treated the same way. After you have dug up the sick plant, treat the soil with a mitecide at least twice, 7 days apart to try to kill any hatchlings.

These mites are somewhat selective and most often attack the canes of multiflora roses. The mites will winter underground beneath the host plant and also may lay dormant for a year or two. Debbie gives the site sponsored by the American Rose Society below: <http://froebuck.home.texas.net/newpage2.htm>