

## Something New, Something Blue, Something Seasonal

As the December days shorten, dusk darkens the remaining red roses and makes the slow-to-fall leaves of the butterfly bush seem to glow a silvery blue, off-setting its straggly shape. The butterflies dearly love Buddleia but many gardeners find them ungainly. Wonderful if you have sufficient space for them to sprawl into but for a small home ground they are a chore. They can be cut back late winter to 18 inches or so but they don't always maintain a graceful shape in their second incarnation, nor do they have as generous a display of bloom.

And the remaining stumpy undercarriage does not boast a high level of aesthetics. Help is at hand! The beloved butterfly bush is now available in a miniature growing only to 24 to 30 inches in height and about three feet across. Wouldn't they be grand massed between a tall dark hedge and a flowering border? One variety will be appearing in spring, Buddleia x 'Blue Chip'.

With the coming of a new season there will be a burst of new fashions in plants to beguile us. There are lots of purple plants I've noticed but hasn't there always been foliage leaning to the brown/burgundy spectrum? Those tones are a vibrant contrast to the lime/acid greens that benefit from being grounded by more somber hues.

Left to her own devices Mother Nature has come up with a rainbow of color including an endless variety of greens. Which is lovely for the season of red-berried holly and ivy. When we decorate with these traditional colors it links us to the children we were as well as to all our distant ancestors. Now I read that a truly modern Yuletide needs turquoise and orange to be fashionable? Is this a north-south divide? Even in the tropic islands of the South China Sea, red and green poinsettias tower over nipa huts at Christmastime. Admittedly all colors are wonderful. Trees white or green, ornaments sky blue and silver or even a homemade dangle of cookies—whatever your heart desires but do put the orange in the toe of your stocking.

In garden design the trend toward sustainability is deepening with more attention being given to the importance of using native plants. Teaming with forward looking architects, landscape designers are adapting to the world we occupy, not a past one we would prefer to inhabit.

### **FOLLOW-UP**

Some time ago in speaking of trees to avoid planting, I mentioned the Norway maple. In Worcester, Mass. A tornado devastated the city in 1953 destroying trees along with a lot more. The tree that was chosen as replacement was the Norway maple because it was sturdy enough to survive the winter cold. This year they are targeted for removal because they are infested with the Asian long-horned beetle.

According to an article in the New York Times, Worcester's greatest mistake was in planting a monoculture. We remember how deadly this habit can be: many of us

grew up in small towns with an Elm Street whose namesake tree branches met over the traffic. When the Dutch elm disease arrived the streets were denuded. Worcester now plans to plant a wide variety of trees, responding to an inventory started in the 1980s and finished in 2006 reporting that 80% of their trees were maples, irresistible to the Asian long-horned beetle.

The potential spreading north of the beetles, has raised concern in the New England states about the impact the infestation may have on fall color, vital to their tourist industry as well as to the commercial production of maple sugar. In Massachusetts when the problem of forest management was first discovered, the money was not available for a remedy. We can only hope state governments will see the necessity of spending prevention money rather than coping with the much more expensive aftereffects.

Incidentally this pest has turned up in Illinois, New Jersey, and New York, making early detection essential. As well as just admiring their street trees, citizens are beginning to study them critically. To show what can be done, Ithaca, NY, after a 1997 inventory, went from having 200 tree varieties to having 450. Astonishing! Ithaca has an innovative program using technology developed by the Forest Service. By entering unusual symptoms, such as small holes, strange growth patterns or other anomalies, into a hand-held computer, the inventory takers can find out the pest responsible for the problem. As the software improves, towns throughout the country can protect their cherished trees.