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Arbor Notes

Fall/Winter 2008



Have You Considered...

Often under-appreciated as ornamental trees, Tamaracks are among the few conifers whose needles turn yellow in the autumn before being blown away by crisp breezes. If you're up for a challenge, they also make good bonsai trees!

Latin name: *Larix laricina*

Common Name(s): Tamarack, American Larch, Eastern Larch

Tree Type: deciduous (loses its needles) conifer.

Sun and water requirements: full sunlight; tolerates a wide range of soil conditions but grows best on wet to moist organic soils.

Expected Growth: 50'-75' tall and 14"-20" in diameter; tree is self-pruning, creating a pyramidal shape; the lower half of the trunk becomes branchless after 25 years or so.

Foliage: clusters of soft, flat needles on twigs; blue-green color turns yellow in the fall.

Fruit: egg shaped cones, reddish-brown; usually persisting through winter.

Landscape Value: used as an ornamental tree, *Larix laricina* is very tolerant to cold temperatures and winter salts. It is also disease and rust resistant.

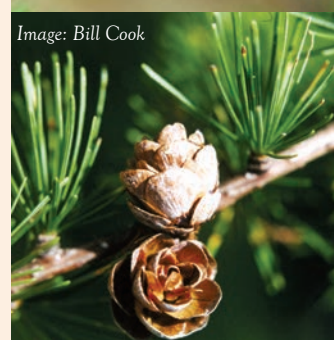
Image: Joseph O'Brien



Image: Steven Katovich



Image: Bill Cook



Sites Worth Seeing: Wave Hill

Image: Bill Foley



Crisp breezes and vibrant hues provide the perfect backdrop for a visit to Wave Hill this autumn. With 28 acres of magnificent landscape overlooking the Hudson River and Palisades in the Bronx, Wave Hill is an exquisite oasis with much to offer.

Originally a country home built in 1843 by jurist William Lewis Morris, Wave Hill's residents have included Theodore Roosevelt, Mark Twain, conductor Arturo Toscanini and chief members of the British Delegation. Deded to the City of New York in 1960, the cultural institution's mission, as they describe it, is to celebrate the artistry and legacy of its gardens and landscapes, to preserve its magnificent views, and to explore human connections to the natural world through programs in horticulture, education and the arts.

Free garden tours are available on Sundays. Fee-based group tours are available by reservation. Download the self-guided tree brochure prior to your visit or bor-

Image: Mick Hales



Wave Hill's gardens contain 80 year old sweetgums, a black cherry that is unique because of its enormous size... and one of the largest elm trees in New York City.

row one from the Perkins Visitor Center. Among the living individuals highlighted in this brochure are 80 year old sweetgums, a black cherry that is unique because of its enormous size - much larger than is generally seen in this species, and one of the largest elm trees in New York City. Whether you're looking for a quiet place to enjoy a good read, take a tai chi class, partake in some bird watching or simply admire the latest blooms, Wave Hill will surely not disappoint.

Details for Visiting Wave Hill

Address: West 249th Street and Independence Avenue, Bronx, NY 10471

Telephone: 718-549-3200

Hours of Operation: Tuesday-Sunday 10am-4:30pm

Admission: Free to members (Individual \$40/year; Family/Dual \$75); non-members \$6

Website: www.wavehill.org

- Getting Up the Tree
- Look Out for Co-Dominant Trunks
- How Does Organic Care Work?
- And more...

Inside
This Issue:

Branch Highlights

New Rochelle, New York

The New Rochelle branch has been involved in a number of tree preservation projects, including in Manhattan's historic Riverside Park, where we've inoculated dozens of American elms for dutch elm disease. Also, Arborist Chris Busak was involved in an incredible tree house installation project this season (Visit barbarabutler.com to see the type of project he was involved in).

Hawthorne, New York

Our branch is sponsoring the 2nd annual Bedford Road race, benefiting several organizations in the community including the John J. Homestead Carriage Barn Restoration Project. We also completed work this season donated as part of an auction benefiting Bedford Village Elementary School.

Stamford, Connecticut

This summer our branch donated half a day of tree work to the Glenbrook Community Center in Stamford, assessing and removing hazardous trees from their playground. We're also looking forward to working with the City of Norwalk, having been re-awarded the planting contract for the city for the next 3 years.

North Haledon, New Jersey

The North Haledon branch will begin work at Farleigh Dickinson University's Madison, NJ campus this fall. In addition to general tree work, Arborist PJ Genberg will perform thorough hazardous tree assessments throughout the campus. This work is an extension of our branch's care for the FDU Teaneck campus.



Almstead's Stamford, CT branch was awarded the Gold Leaf Award for Outstanding Arbor Day Activities from the International Society of Arboriculture for working with the Black Rock School in Bridgeport.

Getting Up the Tree Joe Estrada, Arborist



A question I get a lot from our clients is how will your crew prune and/or remove my tree if they can't get to it with a bucket truck? I usually respond that to perform the work correctly and safely, the best method is to climb the tree. Of course, there are many factors that go into proper climbing that make it a safe and effective task.

The tree care industry is built on the physical and mental talents of experienced tree climbers, or industrial athletes. This field of work takes years to perfect for proficiency and safety. Climbers, like athletes, have to perform at a high level of skill year after year. As with most athletes, if you are not at the top of your game, the risks can be severe.

The levels of professionalism and standardization in the tree care industry have changed drastically over the last three decades. It has gone from what was once considered unskilled labor to a skilled profession that is taught at respected academic institutions throughout the world, including Clemson University, Penn State, and the Universities of Massachusetts, Maryland and Georgia.

At Almstead, we spend a great deal of time and resources keeping our employees up to date with the most current training and techniques available in climbing safety. We work closely with the two leading organizations in our industry, the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) and the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA) to bring the best and safest work practices to our employees and clients.

I just came back from the ISA Conference and World Climbing Competition in St. Louis, Missouri where tree climbers from around the world came to compete for the title of World Champion. [\[cont'd inside\]](#)

Arborist and climbing expert Joe Estrada (see article on right) led a climbing activity for children at Almstead's 2008 family picnic. Here, Julian Orozco enjoys the view from the branches.



A Letter from the CEO



The past month has been a financial struggle for a lot of us, and conversation around the dinner table has turned to protecting our assets and making safe investments. While it certainly won’t solve all of your financial woes, one secure route is to invest in your “green” assets (more commonly known as your landscaping).


I recently attended a conference on arboriculture where a number of interesting statistics were presented. For instance: A healthy, well-kept landscape, especially with mature trees, increases the market value of a home by 7% or higher. Similarly, surveyed home shoppers said they would pay up to 10% more for a home with a healthy, established landscape than one without. And homes with good landscaping spend on average 5-6 fewer weeks on the market than homes without landscaping in similar areas.

These findings essentially confirm what we already know from anecdotal evidence and experience. Conversely, not caring for our landscapes—especially large specimen trees—can cost thousands in unexpected expenses in the event of tree death and/or failure. Add to this the diminished value of your landscape, and it’s clear that improper or absent tree care is actually something of a financial gamble.

Caring for trees and shrubs is relatively inexpensive when done consistently and correctly. That’s why two of the most important services we offer at Almstead are our ongoing Plant Health Care programs and the complimentary seasonal tree and shrub inspections performed by our arborists each fall. Having experts continuously monitoring the trees and shrubs on your property is incredibly valuable, because catching and correcting for problems early on is both highly effective and economical.

I encourage you, as you look at your investments, to seriously consider the value of your “green” assets. Taking a proactive approach to caring for your landscape will benefit you now and in the future.

Sincerely,



Ken Almstead, CEO
International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist



For more info on the signs of hazardous trees, see *A Photographic Guide to the Evaluation of Hazard Trees in Urban Areas* by Nelda P. Matheny and James R. Clark.

Look Out for Co-Dominant Trunks Robin Beaudry, Arborist

Unfortunately, every tree has some potential to fail and cause property damage or personal injury. That’s why it’s important to identify and evaluate the unique defects of individual trees to reduce their hazard risk before a failure event occurs. Nar- row V-angled attachments on co-dominant trunks or large branches are one such defect.

Co-dominant trunks oc- cur when a tree forks off into two equal trunks at some point above ground level. If the curve of the union where the trunk forks (called the crotch) is shaped like a ‘U’ then the mechanical stress on the union, from the weight above, is dis- tributed evenly. However, if the trunks are touching and the crotch is shaped like a ‘V’ (see *Figure 1*), then the mechanical stress on the union is not evenly dis- tributed.

As two trunks with a V-shaped crotch grow in size, they exert a tremendous force against each other, crushing the bark and the wood tissues in between. Often, this pressure causes a long internal crack in the main trunk below the crotch. This crack can extend several feet below the crotch and jeopardize

As two trunks with a V-shaped crotch each grow, they exert a tremendous force against each other, crushing bark and wood tissues in between.

Q&A: Beech Tree Dying from the Top Down

“We have 2 old beech trees in our yard. One appears to be dying from the top down and has several dark spots on the trunk that ooze a dark colored fluid. What is the problem? Will it spread to the other tree?”
— Beverley, Cos Cob, CT

Judging by your description, the tree may be suffering from a problem called bleeding canker. The causal pathogen, phytophthora, is responsible for the death and decline of many specimen beech trees in the northeast. Researchers have identified dozens of phytophthora strains. You may be aware of the escalating issue on the west coast called sudden oak death, which is caused by the *Phytophthora ramorum* strain.

If the dark, oozing spots occur between ground level to a height of 5 to 7 feet on the trunk, odds are you’re seeing phytophthora. Similar symptoms on scaffold branches or in the upper canopy are more likely the result of an insect infestation. With beech trees, once phytophthora becomes severe enough for a casual ob- server to notice, the condition is usually serious. Below the surface, bleeding cankers are often several times larger than they appear. Once these necrotic areas surround the trunk beneath the bark, the entire canopy of the tree begins to wither and die. (Which would explain the dead limbs in the top of your tree.)

The infection does spread, so you should have both trees checked for phytophthora. Unless a tree is in severe decline, there are treatment options. Applying a combination of fungicide and bark penetrant has shown positive results in halting the spread of active cankers and preventing new infections in neighboring trees. Two of our Arborists pitched in with Dr. George Hudler of Cornell University a few years ago during his research of phytopthera and beeches. His current conclusions lean toward using these products as a preventative in the spring and repeating the application in fall.

Removing mature or historic trees is an unpleasant experience and a shock to the landscape. (Not to mention one’s budget.) Modifying growing conditions can eliminate environmental stresses that make trees more susceptible to diseases such as phytophthora. Proper soil moisture, avoiding excess traffic around the tree and maintaining a layer of organic mulch over the root zone are a few examples. With old beeches, an ounce of prevention is far better than a pound of cure.

— Bob Bociek, Connecticut Licensed Arborist



Bleeding canker on the trunk of a beech

Getting Up the Tree [continued from front]

Climbers traveled from every corner of the world: the USA, UK, Germany, Czech Republic, Spain, Ireland, New Zealand, and Australia to name a few. Each year, the competition includes events that measure speed, skill, proficiency and safety. One of the most important events is the Aerial Rescue – an event no tree climber ever wants to perform in the field, but one that could save another climber’s life in the event of a emergency.

New techniques and advancements in tree climbing seem to be developing everyday. The gear used today is designed for comfort, safety, performance, and usability. These new developments are certainly unlike the climbing

tools our forefathers in the industry used, which were uncomfortable, heavy, cumbersome and sometimes even dangerous. What’s more, the tools and techniques used today are also designed to protect the fragile bark tissue in trees during climbing and pruning.

As the field of arboriculture evolves, we at Almstead will continue to strive to bring our clients the safest, most knowledgeable climbers and arborists the industry has to offer. If you’ve been wondering how to care for a hard to reach tree, set up an appointment with your Almstead arborist. You’ll be amazed by what our skilled climbers can accomplish.

“Nothing makes me so happy as to observe nature and to paint what I see.”
- Henri Rousseau

Original artwork: Amanda Placankis, age 11
New Rochelle, NY

One of the greatest powers landscapes hold is to inspire us. We’d love to share how it’s inspiring you in our next newsletter. Send your artwork to our central office:

Almstead Tree & Shrub Care Co.
58 Beechwood Avenue
New Rochelle, NY 10801



How does Organic Care Work? Mike Almstead, Vice President

Like any other science, Arboriculture is full of new discoveries and shifting methodologies. We now know how the same substances we have used to fertilize trees for years are produced naturally, and in effective quantities, by a healthy soil ecosystem. More importantly, we know how to create and maintain such an ecosystem in urban and subur- ban environments.

Part of what makes organic care such an exciting field of discovery is that we are realizing just how much trust we can put in natural processes—so long as we don’t inhibit them. Forest soil ecosystems are the most complex in the natural world. While the ideal soil varies between trees, certain factors are crucial to maintaining beneficial, balanced soil.

In forests, trees live in symbiotic relationships with microscopic organisms: beneficial bacteria and fungi, along with other aerobic microorganisms, naturally promote root and plant growth and defend against harmful factors in the soil.

In the urban environment, poor cultural practices typically damage these natural processes, leading to nutrient-free, highly compacted soil that effectively smothers the aerobic organisms needed for a healthy landscape.

The same substances we’ve used to fertilize trees for years are produced naturally, and in effective quantities, by a healthy soil ecosystem.

The principle of organic care is to establish a well-aerated, biologically rich soil. Our goal is to create and maintain a soil for your trees teeming with the beneficial microorganisms that naturally promote growth while out-competing harmful, disease-caus- ing organisms that often thrive in unhealthy soils.

At Almstead, we prefer to approach organic care holistically, as we find that attending to the overall health of a landscape’s ecosystem is the best way to ensure the health of its individual parts. The success of organic care depends on creating a bal- anced, sustainable environment among the many living creatures involved in life of a tree.

When beneficial organisms live in the root zone of a tree, they take up the space that harmful organisms look to inhabit. For this reason, organic care is the strongest preventative measure available in tree care.

Plant Health Care Clients:
To properly update (or create) your program for next year’s growing season, it’s important to schedule a complimentary inspection with your arborist before winter sets in.



Pruning in Fall & Winter
Bare trees allow arborists to clearly see the entire branch structure of your trees, making for easier identification of defects and potential hazards. Let your Almstead Arborist help maintain or improve the health, appearance and safety of your trees this winter season.



Antidesiccants
Leaves and needles often lose a detrimental amount of moisture during the winter. Prevent damage to your evergreens with an antidesiccant treatment.



Organic Care
Organically caring for your trees and shrubs isn’t just a fad. It’s a long term, eco-friendly approach with strong science behind it. To get started, ask your Almstead arborist about organic solutions for your property.