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June Smithowitz
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Arbor Notes

arbor care plant health care organic consulting lawn care

Have You Considered...

Nyssa sylvatica Common Name(s): Black Tupelo, Black Gum, Pepperidge and Sour Gum

Sun and water requirements: Full or partial sunlight, but can acclimate to partial shade, especially in youth; well-drained acidic soils are optimal but adapts surprisingly well to dry, average soils.

Tree Type: Deciduous (loses its leaves). This tree is hardy in the northeast (zones 2 through 9) and grows from a single stem that rises to the summit of the tree.

Expected Growth: 30ft to 60ft tall and up to 25ft wide, under appropriate conditions. In youth, the *Nyssa sylvatica* is often a pyramidal-shaped tree, eventually maturing to a fat-topped crown.

Flowers and Fruit: Ornementally insignificant, the flowers are small, greenish-white and appear in May with the foliage. Fruit on this tree is mostly a wildlife-attracting nuisance. Choose a male *Nyssa sylvatica* to avoid fruiting.

Foliage: Highly attractive, glossy leaves are dark green in the summer and turn to many shades of yellow, orange, scarlet, and purple in the fall.

Bark: Immature bark is brown to grey-brown with small ridges that slowly give way to flat-topped blocks with deep crevices in-between at maturity.

Landscape Value: Can be used as either a shade or specimen plant. It is primarily known for its spectacular fall colors and ability to adapt to most climatic conditions in the northeast.



Horticultural Calendar: Summer 2008

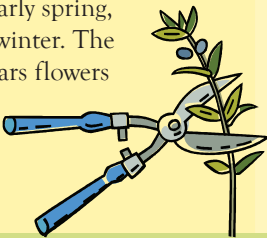
It's finally warm enough to spend time outside again. Here are some tips to help your trees and shrubs look their best while you're out there. Enjoy!

May

- Mid-May is a good time to treat trees with needles for insect and disease. Look for spider mites on conifers by shaking a leaf over white paper; if tiny specs being to crawl, mites are present.

- Place mulch around newly planted trees and shrubs to help reduce weeds, maintain a consistent soil temperature and retain moisture. Almstead carries mulch in a variety of organically-dyed colors.

- Prune to rejuvenate trees and shrubs that flower near the end of summer in early spring, or even in late winter. The buds for this years flowers develop at the beginning of the growing season.



June

- Take measures not to injure roots if installing a new irrigation system, a swingset, or something larger this summer. Call your arborist to create a preservation plan prior to any outdoor construction projects.

- Prune to rejuvenate spring-flowering trees and shrubs after they've bloomed. The buds for next year's flowers will develop over the course of the late summer and early fall.

- Encourage growth and air circulation in your rose bushes by cutting back to a leaflet when picking fresh flowers or removing faded ones.

- Pinch new growth on flowering shrubs, as well as pines, spruces and firs to encourage branching and more compact growth.

July

- Over-watering can severely damage trees and shrubs. Check the soil moisture of your plants by feeling the soil below the surface. If it's moist, lack of watering isn't your problem. Consult with your arborist to learn the best watering practices for your property.

- Dead or diseased wood is easiest to identify when foliage is in full bloom, so take a look at your trees this month. Mid-summer is a wise time to have an arborist inspect your property for problems.

- Shear formal hedges several times throughout the summer. To allow equal sun exposure to all of the foliage on a hedge, create a tapered shape where the top is narrower than the base.



August

- Hedge trimming should be completed this month in order to allow for new growth to ripen for the next growing season.

- This is a good time to prune trees and shrubs for shape without encouraging new growth because it's the end of summer and plants are preparing to store their energy for winter.

- To promote winter hardiness, discontinue dead-heading roses and other shrubs by mid-August.

- The growing season is coming to an end, so be sure to enjoy it while it lasts. If you are one of our Plant Health Care clients, it's time to schedule a seasonal inspection of your property to prepare for next year's program.

Branch Highlights

Stamford, Connecticut

Almstead's Stamford Branch Manager, Bob Bociek, assisted in a tree-planting ceremony at Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo. The ceremony consisted of a reading of the history of Arbor Day, a poem selection from a student attending Black Rock School, and concluded with the planting of a Liberty Elm Tree. Stamford arborists also exhibited at the second annual Norwalk Tree Festival this year. Once again, Almstead's tree-climbing activity for the children in attendance was a great success.

North Haledon, New Jersey

North Haledon is glad to welcome new Branch Manager Walt Kipp to its territory. Walt has over 25 years of experience in the arboriculture industry and specializes in customized plant health care practices. The branch is excited to now be offering its clients the increasingly popular organic treatment programs for tree, shrub and lawn care. They too participated in Earth and Arbor Day events this year, including the donation of a Linden tree to the Tuxedo Park School.

Hawthorne, New York



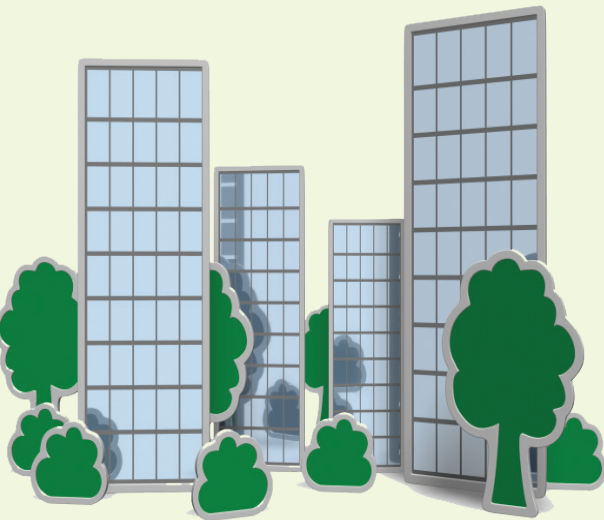
From left, Vice President and arborist Michael Almstead; arborist Jay Nipe; Headmaster James Burger; and New Jersey Branch Manager Walt Kipp pose with a newly planted Linden donated to the Tuxedo Park School by Almstead for Arbor Day.

Practicing arborist and Vice President Michael Almstead is returning to the Hawthorne office after a number of years serving our North Haledon, NJ territory. Likewise, arborist Tim Katenkamp has re-joined the Hawthorne branch this spring. Michael and Tim are both well-versed in organic plant health care and lawn care practices and are looking forward to extending these programs in upper Westchester. We've seen a lot of success with our fully organic compost tea program, and we hope to share this with more of our clients. The environmentally-conscious community here is a great fit for this program.

In conjunction with Cornell Cooperative Extension and the American Chestnut Foundation, the New Rochelle branch donated time to plant a disease-resistant American Chestnut tree in White Plains in April. The branch also participated in many Earth Day and Arbor Day events this year, including a mulch and wood recycling exhibit at Columbus Elementary School in New Rochelle and planting activities with the Eastchester girls scout troop and The Horace Mann School in Riverdale. Also, Branch Manager Ken Almstead was recently appointed to the Cornell Cooperative Extension Board of Directors.

New Rochelle, New York

Understanding Urban Tree Care



Every day, urban trees face hostile environmental conditions in comparison to their rural and even suburban cousins. If we take two trees, plant one on the slope of a Westchester County hill and one on Wall Street and return in 15 years, we'll find (if we find a tree left in the city at all) a great difference in size and appearance.

There are many reasons for this difference, a main one being the lack of nutrients available to our urban tree. Under ideal conditions, a tree's roots are free to extend far out from its trunk to best access nutrients available in soil that is rich in decayed organic matter (i.e. compost) crucial to plant health and growth. In urban areas, trees often stand in small planting beds surrounded by concrete and full of soil that is usually compacted (preventing air and water circulation) and contaminated by de-icing salts, dog urine, oil runoff and cleaning agents from sidewalk washings.

Trees in urban parks face additional challenges, including reflective heat from buildings in the summer, mechanical damage to their trunks from lawnmowers, and heavy traffic over their root systems. It's no wonder that it's hard for urban trees to survive, let alone fully mature and remain healthy.

Luckily, some tree species are more vibrant in urban environments than others. Choosing the right trees to plant is an important component of sustaining our urban forests. However, even with the right species, it's important that we take time to care for trees in the city. The man-made challenges of the city are difficult for trees to face naturally; instead, they require consistent human monitoring and interventions such as soil amendments, root care and pruning. If you're fortunate enough to live with one or more trees in the city, ask your Almstead arborist about developing a comprehensive plant health care program.

- Understanding Urban Tree Care
- Should you Save your Favorite Tree?
- Tips for Pruning your Ornamental Trees and Shrubs
- And more...

A Letter from the CEO

Spring is probably the most exciting season for me as an arborist because wherever I go, I meet people as enthusiastic about trees and plants as I am year-round. As the communities we serve once again turn their attention to the outdoors, here at Almstead we welcome opportunities for involvement. Over the years, we’ve been lucky to develop a lot of strong relationships with various community organizations including schools, town boards, nature centers, and garden clubs—just take a look at our Branch Highlights section.

Now more than ever, it’s important to educate ourselves and others on how to properly care for the earth; and it’s equally important to take action. Trees are highly valuable natural resources, but they can be difficult to maintain and cultivate, especially in urban and suburban settings. It’s our hope that the opportunities we have been given at Almstead to share our knowledge of tree health and preservation ultimately have a positive impact on our communities.

Recently, I was appointed to the Board of Directors of The Cornell Cooperative Extension, an environmental public service organization serving Westchester County. Through organizations like this, I look forward to Almstead becoming more involved than ever.



Ken Almstead teaches a group of students about root systems as part of a planting activity for second graders at the Horace Mann School in Riverdale, NY.

If you belong to a group or are holding an event that you think would benefit from the knowledge and skills of a professional arborist, please call your local office. Or, as always, feel free to contact me directly at kalmstead@almstead.com. We’d be delighted to arrange something with you.

Sincerely,

Ken Almstead, CEO
Certified Arborist #NY0335A

Q&A: Organic Lawn, Tree & Shrub Care

I’m looking to reduce the use of chemicals in our home and landscape. The amount of information and opinion is overwhelming; we want to do the right thing but don’t want the place to look rough and shaggy. I want beauty as well as the ability to roll in the grass and walk barefoot without worrying about what was sprayed the day before. Is there an effective organic solution available?

— Jennifer, Stamford, CT

Yes, there is. However, it requires a change of thinking and a coordinated effort between all involved with the maintenance of your property. Organic programs are simple: return to the soil what would be there naturally if it had been left alone. In the case of forest soils, there’s a natural order in which each organism plays a role that ensures survival of the forest as a whole. When trees and other plants fall, they are decomposed by living micro-organisms and turn into “food” in the soil—replenishing what the living plants are depleting. It’s a give-and-take system that’s remarkably efficient when left alone. In the landscape, however, we remove anything that falls to the ground, robbing the soil of organic matter. As a result, the related organisms that would normally break organic matter down into nutrients that plants can use remain inactive or die out. When we repeat this season after season, plant life either expires or becomes dependent on artificial means for sustenance.

Organic programs introduce organic matter and beneficial micro-organisms into the landscape in order to restore the natural balance of forest soil (or grassland soil in the case of lawn care). This reduces and ultimately eliminates the need for constant chemical controls. It does take time, however, and there is no absolute science to date. Homeowners must develop a tolerance for a weed or two in their lawn until the turf sufficiently thickens to choke them out. Initially, it’s a challenge; but in the long run, you’ll have a healthier piece of the planet beneath your feet and one that requires far less effort to maintain as the years pass. To learn more about the specifics of organic tree and shrub care, set up an appointment with your arborist. We also currently offer organic lawn care to our New Jersey clients and hope to extend this program in seasons to come.

— Bob Bociek
CT Tree Protective Agency Licensed Arborist

Arboriculture 101

When pruning and otherwise caring for trees, it’s important to do just that: care about the trees. What’s convenient or looks nice to us isn’t necessarily what’s best for a tree, and ultimately, unhealthy trees often create hazards down the road. As arborists, it’s our job to ensure that we take the best possible care of trees and balance that with the needs and desires of the people who live with those trees. Unfortunately, not everyone prescribing care in our industry is an arborist, so it’s important for you as a consumer to educate yourself. Here are some “tree care” practices to watch out for.

Unbalanced Canopy



Another pruning problem to look out for is an unbalanced canopy. A tree’s stability is highly dependent on its structure—especially during storms. Even if pruning only needs to be performed on one side of a tree to meet a client’s concerns, a qualified arborist will take into account the overall structure.

Let’s start with the practice of topping trees, or the indiscriminate cutting back of limbs. Topping tends to remove most of a tree’s leaves, essentially starving it of nutrients from the sun and air, leading to stress and potential death. Also, trees heal naturally when pruned at limb junctures; however, limbs cut elsewhere do not heal quickly and may decay, opening up the tree to insect and disease problems. Recovering from topping takes a tree 15-20 years, leaving a problem tree prone to branch failure in the meantime. Moreover, topped trees are ugly. There are much better methods for reducing the height and breadth of a tree that is oversized for its location that manage to retain a natural shape and work with that tree’s natural healing mechanisms.

Topping



Lion’s Tailing

Some tree care practices are done for aesthetic reasons, but are ultimately damaging to trees. One example of this is lion’s tailing: stripping branches out until the edge of the canopy. Lion’s tailing is a form of overpruning that creates unstable, top-heavy branches and opens up parts of the tree normally covered in the growing season to sunscald.



Volcano Mulching

Volcano mulching is another aesthetically-pleasing (to some), tree-damaging practice. In the long run, piling mulch high above a tree’s natural root flare (where the roots fan out just before entering the earth), creates an environment that encourages improper, girdling root growth as well as root rot. Damaged root systems are especially hazardous as they support the entire tree.

Finally, keep an eye out for climbing spikes. Climbers should only use spikes if they are removing a tree—never when climbing a live tree. Spiking leaves open wounds in tree trunks that are susceptible to insect and disease damage. Knowledgeable tree crews always use more respectful methods of climbing.



Weir Farm

Weir Farm

Looking for a quick place to get away and really get back to nature? Connecticut’s Weir Farm in Branchville, Connecticut is a convenient, yet beautiful spot. Named after American Impressionist painter Julian Alden Weir, this site offers the same comfort and inspiration to its visitors now as it did in the past. Blossoming fruit trees, mature oaks and sugar maples line a 1.8-mile loop along the property. Weir Farm offers two trails for visitors to walk, hike, bird watch, paint and take guided tours. Whether you choose to stroll the fields among the studios and farm buildings or opt for the trail with the rocky forest and trickling waterfalls that lead to a beautiful historic pond, you’ll be sure to find the natural beauty you came in search of.

Weir Farm
National Historic Site
735 Nod Hill Rd.
Wilton, CT
Phone: (203) 834-1896
Call for information about programs and scheduled tours
Admission: Free

Should you Save your Favorite Tree?

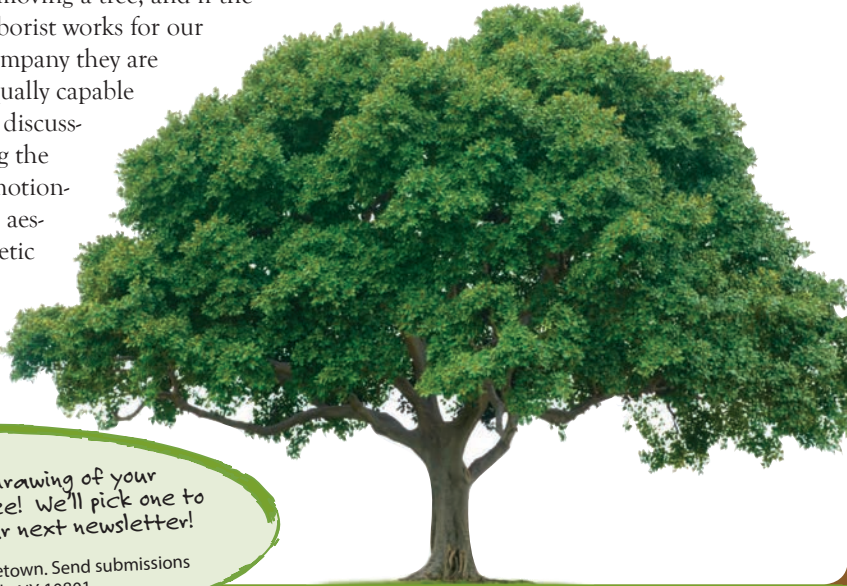
Is there anything more difficult than trying to decide if you should remove or save a damaged or aging feature tree on your property? The tree may be older than you are and have been there before the home was even built. The decision should include the value of the tree to the landscape and the cost to restore and maintain it. If you have lived in your home for a while, the emotional attachment to the tree may pull heavily on your heart, as you may treasure memories, privacy, shade or the sheer beauty associated with a particular tree.

The best minds in the arboricultural field have collaborated to produce a publication that creates a precise mathematical process for assessing the value of a tree. The Guide for Plant Appraisal, now in its 9th Edition (commissioned by the American Society of Consulting Arborists, authored by the Council of Tree and Landscape Appraisers and published by the International Society of

Arboriculture), contains a step-by-step process for tree evaluation. The process even includes a workbook with tools to determine replacement cost value similar to the worksheet used by home appraisers. Tree appraisal involves size, species, condition and location where home appraisal uses age, square footage, number of rooms and type of construction.

A certified arborist can take you through the economics of saving or removing a tree, and if the arborist works for our company they are equally capable of discussing the emotional, aesthetic

and environmental aspects of the decision. The Almstead Team is taught to ask questions to be sure that we are addressing what is important to you, the caretaker, in order to provide a strategy for maintaining your property’s value both economically and emotionally. We need to understand how the property is used, what plans you have for the future and what is important to you in order to provide a sound solution. And... yes; we are a little biased in favor of saving the specimen tree.



kids! Send us a drawing of your favorite tree! We'll pick one to publish in our next newsletter!

Please include your name, age, & hometown. Send submissions to 58 Beechwood Avenue, New Rochelle NY 10801.

Tips for Pruning your Ornamental Trees and Shrubs

Pruning is a simple concept, complicated only by the large number of simple rules there are to follow. Here are some guidelines to get you on the right track for pruning the shrubs and small ornamental trees on your property.

There are a few problems you

should always look to correct during pruning (see figure A). Narrow, v-shaped crotches are structurally weak and should be removed while they are still small. Likewise, trees are always strongest with one main stem, so remove any competing terminals. Eliminate crossing or rubbing branches, choosing the healthiest, best-placed branch to remain in that area. Also, remove branches that are broken, damaged or diseased. Finally, prune to improve the look of your tree or shrub. Think about shape as well as mass—thinning out branches often improves appearance.

When pruning trees, it’s usually best to cut branches back to a main stem. Woody plants have natural mechanisms that help them heal at main junctures. It’s important not to sever the branch collar (figure B) as that is

where these mechanisms are.

To encourage growth in shrubs, prune back small branches or twigs just above a bud at a 45° angle.

Untended shrubs will require heavy rejuvenation pruning. Prune tree-like shrubs back to a main stem, as described above (figure C). On the other hand, prune cane-shaped shrubs all the way to the ground.

Timing is crucial to proper pruning. See our horticultural calendar for some tips, and visit <http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/nursery/430-462/430-462.html>.

Pruning larger trees can be difficult and dangerous; a good rule of thumb is if you’re thinking of pruning a branch that you couldn’t carry comfortably with one hand, call your arborist.

