

Arbor Notes

Spring/Summer 2010



Chickadee



Viburnum



Cedar Waxwing



Butterfly Bush



Blue Jay

Request a Consultation

Please contact me to schedule a **complimentary on-site consultation** with a professionally certified arborist.

I'm also interested in:

- Arbor Care** Customized pruning, mature tree preservation, tree and stump removal...
- Plant Health Care** Fertilization, disease and pest control, monitoring programs...
- Organic Care** Compost teas, organic pest controls, natural soil and root care...
- Consulting** Hazardous tree evaluation, mature tree preservation, construction protection...
- Lawn Care** Fertilization, weed control, seeding, core aeration, organic options...

Name _____
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Have You Considered...?

You don't need to be Snow White to attract birds and butterflies to your home — the right plant material will do the trick. Both birds and butterflies seek out trees and shrubs for shelter, so having a mix of trees and dense bushes to suit both high and low nesting habits is a great start. However, providing the right food is what will really set your landscape apart.

For butterflies, choosing the right plants for food is a twofold process. After all, butterflies start out as caterpillars, and the two can have very different appetites. Eastern Tiger Swallowtail caterpillars, for instance, eat the leaves of a variety of trees and shrubs, including Ironwood and Tulip trees. However, the butterflies of this beautiful species eat the nectar from wildflowers, like Butterfly Weed (which contrary to its name is noninvasive and has beautiful flowers).

Monarch caterpillars, on the other hand, will eat only Milkweed species, while the butterflies themselves are happy with a variety of nectars including those from Milkweed plants. These include Butterfly Bush (available in a variety of vibrant colors; pictured above), Marigolds (which double as a natural mosquito repellent), and Lilacs, among many others.

For birds, a balanced diet doesn't begin and end at the bird feeder. Berries, for instance, are a wonderful lure for birds. It's best to choose plant material that is native so that the bird species native to this area are sure to stop by for a snack. There are many ornamentals to choose from that serve up native berries, including Viburnums (with beautiful clusters of fruit; pictured above), Serviceberries (small multi-stemmed trees with a beautiful open form), and American Holly (which provides much-needed food in winter months).

Another very important food source for birds is insects. Now, we aren't recommending that you drop handfuls of bugs into your yard. Rather, native trees and shrubs host native insects, which in turn feed native birds. Some plants host a greater diversity of insect species than others, and these will attract a wider variety of birds. Oaks are great examples of trees that host a lot of different insects. They also grow to be majestic mature trees, enhancing your landscape value in more ways than one. Other trees to consider are Ironwoods (which we already know also attract some butterflies), Birches, Cherries, and Maples.

These are just a few examples of how you might attract wildlife to your property. The basic guidelines, though, are to choose native plant material, increase the diversity of your plantings, and make colorful flowers and fruits a regular sight from your windows!

Post-Storm Tree Assessment

The tree damage after March's storm was extensive, and we have been working with homeowners and property managers throughout the area to restore the safety and beauty of their landscapes ever since. During this time, our arborists have had the opportunity to observe many tree failures. A lot of the trees simply could not bear the sheer strength of the winds, resulting in snapped trunks and branches. What's more, the ground was so heavily saturated with water that a large number of trees lost their hold and uprooted entirely.

However, not all of the trees damaged by the storm failed immediately. Even months later, Almstead arborists are encountering trees that appear stable at first glance, but upon careful inspection have partially shifted root plates or other damage that may have resulted in sudden unexpected failures if they remained unnoticed.

Taking care of the noticeable damage done to your trees by the storm is very important, but it is equally important to take preventative action against sudden future failures—starting with a visual ground inspection by a certified arborist. There are many serious problems an arborist will pick up on that the crew cleaning up your trees after the storm may not have addressed. For instance, stress cracks may require cabling and/or bracing supports. Also, snapped or ripped branches often lead to serious internal decay when not followed by pruning. In fact, improper pruning cuts, which may have been made during emergency service, can have the same long-term detrimental effects.

Many trees shifted in the ground during the storm, leaving them unstable and often hazardous. One common sign that a tree has shifted is the presence of cracks in the soil surrounding the [continued inside]



One common sign that a tree has shifted is the presence of cracks in the soil surrounding the trunk.

Put it Together, and What Have You Got?



Incorporating compost into the root zone of a mature Beech suffering from poor soil conditions.

An Added Benefit...

A responsible recycling method, making compost is essentially free! Check out these books for a great introduction to home composting and get to know the microorganisms that make the magic happen...

- **Let it Rot!: The Gardener's Guide to Composting**, Stu Campbell
- **Teaming with Microbes: The Organic Gardener's Guide to the Soil Food Web**, Jeff Lowenfels

The science behind composting is both simple to follow and incredibly complex, with billions of microorganisms hard at work behind the scenes. The natural process of decomposition is as old as plants themselves, and it's practically unavoidable. Whether it's a forgotten item in the fridge or flowers past their prime, we've all witnessed the beginning stages of decomposition. The microorganisms responsible for breaking down organic materials into smaller and smaller particles are all around us. The act of composting is simply a streamlining of this process.

There are a variety of composting methods, including vermicomposting (utilizing worms) and cold composting (an easy, relatively unmonitored process), but hot composting is probably the most popular. As they metabolize organic matter, microbes actually produce heat. A hot compost pile is thick enough to trap that heat in the center. The benefits of this are twofold. First, thermophiles (heat-loving microorganisms) become active as the pile heats up, and they are faster decomposers than those active at lower temperatures. The heat also cooks out harmful pathogens from the compost and prevents weed seeds from germinating.

To do their job effectively, the microbes at work during hot composting also require air (which is introduced by occasionally turning the pile) and water. The material, or feedstock, that goes into the compost is important as well. Composting microorganisms use carbon for energy and nitrogen as a building block for reproduction, so the presence of both elements is critical. As a general rule, brown materials (wood, brown leaves) are more carbon heavy and green materials (fresh grass clippings, kitchen scraps) are more nitrogen heavy.

When compost is incorporated into the soil, the microbial activity continues—consuming tiny bits of organic matter and releasing nutrients that plants can use. The solid portion of compost provides plenty of rich organic matter for the microbes to thrive in, but adding the microbes themselves through a compost tea is also effective. Teas add a boost of active organisms to the soil, getting the nutrient-producing cycle started, and we can also apply liquid forms of organic foods for the microbes to keep them healthy and active. A soil analysis will give your arborist a good idea of what path will work best for a particular area, but it's a sure thing that your plants will benefit from some form of compost.



A healthy tablespoon of soil contains billions of beneficial microorganisms

A Letter from the CEO



After a storm of this magnitude, two things about our trees become abundantly clear. The first is that we cannot afford to neglect the health and safety of our landscapes. Every tree has what we call an associated risk, and having this information is critical to making good decisions about the type of service a tree requires. The other side of the coin, however, is that beautiful mature trees are invaluable additions to our properties, and we truly miss many of those that we've lost.

With Earth Day and Arbor Day passing recently, I have been thinking a lot about the legacy of trees. During a visit to the Barnard School in New Rochelle, we talked to kids about the benefits of trees: from oxygen production and carbon sequestration to shading our houses and providing homes for birds and animals. It can be easy to forget the magnitude of something when you work with it everyday, and this was a great opportunity for reflection.

We are in a unique position in time right now where we are really beginning to embrace land stewardship as an individual responsibility. Many of us seek out organic local produce; choosing native plants for landscaping is gaining popularity; and we've made environmental science a priority in what we teach our children and ourselves. We have the opportunity to leave behind a legacy of changed habits and renewed responsibility.

Caring for our trees so that they can be enjoyed by future generations is a part of that legacy. After a large storm, it is especially important to have your trees assessed for damage. However, regular assessments and long term care are the keys to keeping trees healthy and safe for years to come, and we should not lose sight of that goal. Also, I urge you to consider replacing lost trees with those that will stand the test of time. Our landscapes today would be much less majestic if our predecessors had planted short-lived ornamentals.

Sincerely,

Ken Almstead, CEO International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist NY0335

An Unusual Day for an Arborist

A Story from a Treasured Client for her Grandchildren

I was going around on the hill with the man who helps me with trees and bushes in our garden. His name is Ken.

We saw fluttering in a tree. Then we saw it again. And again. He said, "A bird is caught in the vines growing on the tree." We went to a place where we could see it better. Sure enough, he pointed out, that the vines were wrapped tightly around the bird's wing. The bird fluttered and fluttered but could not break loose from the vine. "Do you have a limb-cutter on a long pole?"

I went to get a rake and a long limb-cutter. Just the day before, Papa and I had been cleaning out the cottage. "Better save this," said Papa about the long limb-cutter.

The man used the rake to pull off the vines so he could see the bird better. The bird was scared and fluttered and fluttered some more. The bird was getting tired. Ken said, "I will need gloves to hold him."

While Ken started cutting the vines with the long limb-cutter, I ran to get scissors and Leny's help finding heavy gloves. I brought the scissors. Leny brought the dish-washing gloves, the only ones she could find. They were flimsy and torn, but they would have to do.

Ken was cutting the vines a short distance from the bird to free him. The bird fell to the ground, the vines still wrapped around his wing. Ken put on the gloves. "I'll hold him, You cut off the vines."

He tried to hold the bird but the bird fluttered into some low plants. Finally, he held him. I snipped the vines—they were tight and close together. I didn't want to hurt the bird's wing.

One snip. Two snips.

The bird wiggled out of Ken's hand and fluttered down to the driveway. There was still some vine around the wing. He hobbled under the car.

"What will happen to him?" I asked Ken as we scrambled down the steps to see if we could catch him again.

The bird left the shelter of the car. He stood at the top of the sledding hill, he spread his wings—and flew—the last of the vine fell off. He was free!

Ken and I were very happy.

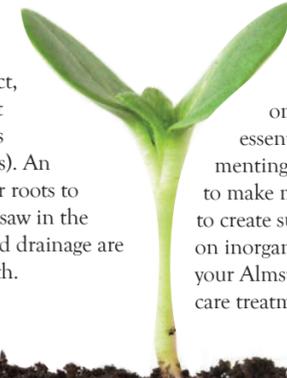
—Love, Baubie



Respect your Roots... Starting with the Soil

When you look at a plant, whether it's a majestic tree, a single flower, or a lawn full of grass, it's easy for the roots to become an afterthought. In fact, we're most likely to think of roots when it's time to remove them: pulling an obnoxious weed or digging out an unwanted shrub. *Ugh, roots! Do they ever end?* Root systems are extensive, and they're also vital to plant health for a variety of reasons.

First off, roots anchor plants to the ground. This is pretty basic, but it's also a good example of how dependent an effective root system is on the surrounding soil. If it's too compact, roots have a hard time growing out and forming a stable base (which is important for large plants like trees). An oversaturated soil makes it hard for roots to maintain their grip (a problem we saw in the recent storm). So, soil structure and drainage are both critical elements in root health.



Roots also transport water, and that means they need soil that can stay moist. Good soils are actually 50% pore space, meaning that only half is made of solid particles (mainly minerals). In between those particles are both water, which we know roots need, and air. Roots need air too—oxygen, to be exact (in contrast to foliage, which requires carbon dioxide for photosynthesis).

Beneficial soil microorganisms also require air.

Their role is to produce plant-available nutrients by breaking down organic matter (like that in compost).

Organic matter and microorganisms only take up 5% of the soil, but they are essential to healthy root systems. By supplementing this part of the soil, along with aerating to make more space for air and water, we are able to create sustainable systems that aren't dependent on inorganic fertilizers to boost plant health. Ask your Almstead arborist about organic soil and root care treatments that make sense for your property.

Take Advantage of a Complimentary Inspection

One of the most valuable services we offer our clients here at Almstead is an expert visual ground inspection of their trees, shrubs and turf on an annual basis, and it's complimentary.

To schedule an inspection, just return the card below. We'll make sure it gets to your arborist!

Post-Storm Tree Assessment [continued from front]



When branches from two different trees are crossing paths, it is an indication that there has been an unnatural shift.

trunk. As time goes by, these cracks in the soil do tend to fill in and become less obvious. However, a shift is still problematic even as warning signs fade.

It's also important to pay attention to leaning trees after a strong storm. Leaning may be an indication that a tree has been moved by the storm and is no longer firmly rooted to the ground. We find that

our clients often notice when a tree they see daily is leaning if it wasn't before. If this is something you have noticed, do not hesitate to call an arborist for a professional assessment.

Of course, some trees do have natural leans. However, even slight leans should not be dismissed out of hand. Here's another warning sign: If the canopy or branches of a tree are protruding, growing into, or rubbing against another tree, it is an indication that at least one of the trees is leaning unnaturally or has shifted. Crossing paths in this way goes against the natural pattern of growing away from each other to maximize sunlight exposure.

The earlier potential problems with your trees are assessed and managed, the safer it is for your property. The summer storm season is coming up, and we always encourage our clients to have their trees inspected in preparation for potential severe weather. Taking this precaution this year is even more critical than usual. If you contact your local office, we will gladly send out an arborist to perform a complimentary visual ground inspection of your trees.



We are pleased to announce that arborists Tim Katenkamp and Ken Almstead are among nearly 200 new Organic Land Care Professionals throughout the Northeast and beyond accredited by the NOFA Organic Land Care Program, a project of the Northeast Organic Farming Association. Ken and Tim are actually the second set of Almstead arborists to complete the NOFA accreditation program, and we look forward to educating even more members of our staff. There are always new and exciting developments in the field of Organic Care, and we are dedicated to staying apprised of the options that are best for our clients and their landscapes.



Places to Visit: Rockefeller State Park Preserve

Immerse yourself in the beauty of spring at the Rockefeller State Park Preserve! Running alongside the Hudson River, this oasis is only 30 minutes outside of New York City but is brimming with plenty of wildlife and scenic vistas for you to enjoy.

Donated over time to the State of New York by the Rockefeller family, much of the park's 1,400



acres once comprised a portion of the family's estate in Pocantico Hills. With over 20 miles of original soft carriage trails that connect seamlessly to the remaining 35 miles of family owned trails, visitors can stroll through different habitats, including meadows, wetlands, meandering rivers and the 24-acre Swan Lake, all in one visit. One trail even connects to the Rockwood Hall, and the footprint of what had once been William Rockefeller's 220 room mansion and the grandest estate on the Hudson River. Visitors can still enjoy the Olmstead designed landscape that includes a century-old

alley of Copper Beeches and panoramic views of the Hudson River. Other extraordinary specimens found in the Preserve include Weeping Beeches, Sargent Hemlocks and Tree Peonies.

If strolling isn't for you, however, jogging, horseback riding, fishing (in season), photography, and painting or sketching are all also popular activities in the park. Having been designated an

Important Bird Area by the Audubon Society, it is certainly a must visit area for bird watchers. Whatever your reason for visiting the Rockefeller State Park Preserve this season, you're sure to find even more reasons to return.

Address: 125 Phelps Way Pleasantville, NY

Telephone: (914) 631-1470

Hours of Operation: Open every day of the year from sunrise to sunset, closed Christmas Day
Admission: Free with state park season pass; \$6 vehicle fee

www.nysparks.state.ny.us/parks/59/details.aspx



Freshly Brewed Compost Teas

Our freshly brewed compost teas are made with the finest quality local leaf and twig compost available. Infuse your soil with the beneficial microorganisms that help soil produce the nutrients plants need naturally.



Lawn Care Programs

Almstead offers lawn care services in all of our branches! Call our office for a complimentary assessment to discuss our lawn care program options (Organic Based, Pure Organic and Traditional) with an expert.



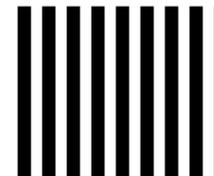
Plant Health Care Contracts

The growing season is in full swing! If you haven't approved your Plant Health Care contract yet, it's imperative that you do so as soon as possible to get the best results for your landscape.



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