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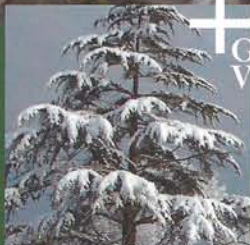
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Page 20

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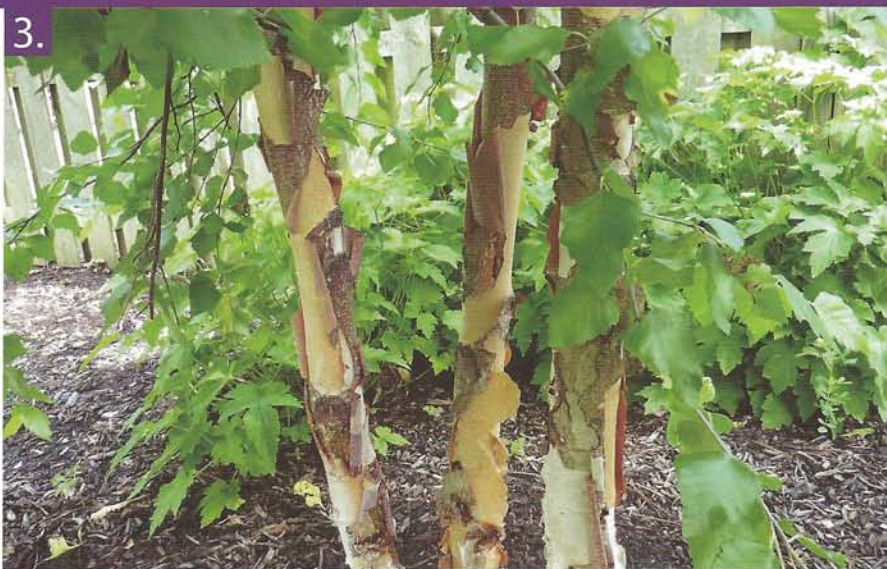
+ GARDENS TO VISIT IN WINTER
Enjoy the fresh air and get inspired this season
Page 12



+ MAKING IT YOUR OWN
How to add individuality to your garden space
Page 32



Trees With Ornamental Bark for Winter Interest



An often overlooked feature in the garden, a tree's bark is most important in the winter. Here are several types of trees you might want to plant next spring.

**Story & Photography By
Scott A. Zanon**



Long after the seasons of spring, summer and autumn have passed, you can still enjoy the trees in your landscape. After the leaves fall, some trees stand out in the garden with their unique bark. Some have bark with interesting texture, while others provide striking colors. An often overlooked feature in the garden, bark is most important in the winter. Trees continue to exude their beauty even in the bleakest of winters.

It is the form, not the function, that catches the eye of the gardener. During winter, bark can take center stage with its beauty and interest. What a treat to have trees that provide gardeners a show during their “down time” of the year. Now is a great time to plan your own winter garden.

Consider the bark of various trees as an interesting focal point in the garden. It may be thin, thick, smooth, colorful, textured or a pleasing combination of all. Either way, bark characteristics can provide an interesting view not normally noticed during the other seasons of the year.

Here is a list of my tree recommendations to consider. Many also have features

that merit use year round in the garden. Experiment and have fun, for your plantings will provide some solace and joy from Old Man Winter during the short dreary days of January and February.

1. Paperbark Maple (*Acer griseum*)

Zones: 4 to 8

Size: 20-30 feet tall by 15 feet wide

A true specimen, this small ornamental tree has unrivaled aesthetic qualities. It is somewhat expensive, but worth it for its year-round splendor. The peeling and exfoliating cinnamon-colored bark is visually striking, plus the late red fall color is outstanding. Have patience with its slow growth, the reward will be outstanding.

2. Striped Maple (aka Snake Bark Maple, Moosewood) (*Acer pensylvanicum*)

Zones: 3 to 7

Size: 15-25 feet tall and wide

A lovely small tree that should be pruned as needed to show off the beau-

tiful bark. It does not tolerate afternoon sun, typical of an understory tree. The young branches are green with conspicuously long, vertical white stripes and the clear yellow to golden fall color is satisfying. Recommended cultivars include ‘Erythrocladum’, which has twigs that have a beautiful bright coral-red winter color and ‘White Tigress’, which has green bark with pronounced white striations and is more heat tolerant.

3. River Birch (*Betula nigra*)

Zones: 4 to 9

Size: 40-60 feet tall by 40 feet wide

This large, fine-textured shade tree is also considered an ornamental because of its exfoliating papery sheets of bark in shades of white, black, cinnamon and cream. Some chlorosis may occur in high pH soils. Available as a multi-trunked form of three to five trunks, this fine specimen tree is perfect for areas along streams or ponds. It is a medium-fast grower and provides solid yellow fall color. Recommended cultivars include ‘Cully’ (aka Heritage), which is larger leaved with more exfoliation and has outstanding bark color; ‘Little King’ (aka Fox Valley), which is 10 feet tall by 12 feet wide with a dense compact oval growth habit; and ‘Whit XXV’ (aka City Slicker), which has darker green leaves and shows superior drought and cold tolerance

4. European Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*)

Zones: 4 to 7

Size: 50 to 60 feet tall and 35 to 45 feet wide

It would be difficult to find a finer specimen tree. This large, graceful four-season shade tree is more tolerant of compacted soils than American beech (*F. grandifolia*), although there may be some surface roots with age. It naturally branches close to the ground and has few problems. Its smooth gray bark is outstanding and is darker than American beech. Fall color is a golden bronze. Recommended cultivars include ‘Asplenifolia’, which is a fine-textured form with cut leaves that turn golden brown in fall, and ‘Tricolor’, which has outstanding purple foliage with irregular cream and rose-colored borders, but does tend to lose its color as season goes on.

5. Seven-Son Flower

(*Heptacodium miconioides*)

Zones: 5 to 8

Size: 15-20 feet tall and 10 feet wide

Introduced to this country by the Arnold Arboretum and U.S. National Arboretum from China, this is a beautiful multi-stemmed shrub or small tree. Its tan bark exfoliates to reveal an attractive brown inner bark, reminding me of an old honeysuckle plant. In late summer the white flowers open with a lovely fragrance. In fall, the ornamental calyx turns bright purple-red and lasts until the first hard frost.

5.

6. Dawn Redwood

(*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*)

Zones: 5 to 8

Size: 70 feet tall by 25 feet wide

This large, stately deciduous conifer exhibits a distinct conical form. It is a lovely specimen and ornamental tree excelling in groves and along streams and lakes. It also makes a very effective screen. Plant it in an area large enough to accommodate its size. The bark is red-brown in youth, then becoming darker, fissured and exfoliating in narrow strips. It has a medium-fast growth rate with cinnamon-brown fall color. Recommended cultivars include 'Ogon' and 'Gold Rush', which have yellow leaves with burnt orange fall color and fast growth, and 'Raven' (aka Shaw's Legacy), which has a uniform pyramidal shape with dark green needles and deep, furrowed bark.

7. Persian Parrotia (aka Persian Ironwood)

(*Parrotia persica*)

Zones: 4 to 8

Size: 30 feet tall by 20 feet wide

This is one of the best specimen trees known for foliage, bark and pest resistance. This is an outstanding small ornamental tree with few rivals. It is typically low branched, but there are tree forms. Bark exfoliates on older trunks exposing a mosaic of gray, brown, white and green. Fall colors of yellow to orange to scarlet are outstanding. Recommended cultivars include: 'Biltmore', which has a low-branching, rounded form with fabulous bark, and 'Vanessa', which has an upright, columnar form with vivid yellow fall color.



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8. Lacebark Pine (*Pinus bungeana*)

Zones: 4 to 7

Size: 30-40 feet tall by 20-30 feet wide

Though a slow grower, this specimen tree is valued for its showy, striking bark. It must be steadily limbed up from a young age for its trunk and larger branches to receive proper sunlight, which develops the handsome mottled bark of exfoliating patches of green, white, gray, orange and brown. Beware that some damage may occur under heavy snowfall and ice loads.

9. Japanese Stewartia

(*Stewartia pseudocamellia*)

Zones: 5 to 7

Size: 25-40 feet tall and 10-20 feet wide

One of the nicest multi-season ornamental trees for the garden, Japanese Stewartia offers magnificent camouflaged exfoliating bark with flaky, but smooth, patches of gray, brown and rust. Additionally it has beautiful orange-red fall color along with the lovely white flowers in midsummer. Avoid placing this Japanese native in hot spots because it prefers morning sun. It performs best in light shade, especially in the hottest part of summer.



10.

10. Chinese Tree Lilac (aka Pekin Lilac or Peking Lilac) (*Syringa pekinensis*)

Zones: 3 to 7
Size: 15-20 feet tall and 10-15 feet wide

A small tree-form lilac for the landscape, this exhibits greater heat tolerance, flowers earlier and has a finer texture because of smaller leaves and stems than the Japanese tree lilac (*S. reticulata*). It exhibits a very nice smooth and copper-colored bark that peels and flakes in sheets. Cherry-like prominent horizontal lenticels add to the ornamental value, as do the fragrant creamy white long panicles in early summer. Recommended cultivars include 'Morton' (aka China Snow), which is an upright single-stemmed form with exfoliating cherry-like bark, and 'Sun Dak' (aka Copper Curls), which shows coppery-orange exfoliating bark, is multi-trunked and has improved winter hardiness.



11.

11. Common Bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*)

Zones: 4 to 9
Size: 50-70 feet tall by 20-30 feet wide

This large deciduous conifer is an upright, stately pyramidal tree. Use as a focal point or specimen. It is superb in exceptionally moist areas but showing its versatility, it is also dry-site capable. Some chlorosis may occur in high-pH soils. Bark is red-brown with some exfoliation and the fall color has shades of russet, orange and bronze. Recommended cultivars include 'Michelson' (aka Shawnee Brave), which is a narrow, fastigate form with blue-green foliage, and 'Peve Minaret', which is a compact, dwarf, pyramidal form that is 8-10 feet tall by 3 feet wide with a thick trunk.



12.

12. Lacebark Elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*)

Zones: 5 to 9
Size: 40-50 feet tall and wide

This is a durable, large, shade, street or specimen tree. Arguably, it is the best all-around elm because of its combination of foliage, fall color, ornamental bark and resistance to Dutch elm disease. The branch strength of this tree is sometimes questioned because ice and wind storms may cause damage. Its bark is a magnificent mottled and exfoliating combination of green, gray, orange and brown. Fall color is yellow to red-purple in early to mid-November. Recommended cultivars include 'Emerald Isle' or 'Emer I' (aka Athena), which is rounded and may be the hardiest selection; 'Ohio', which is a U.S. National Arboretum introduction with reddish fall color; and 'Small Frye', a selection by plant guru Michael Dirr, it is a small tree with a mushroom-shaped top.

13. Japanese Zelkova

(*Zelkova serrata*)
Zones: 5 to 8
Size: 60 feet tall and wide

Here is a handsome large shade tree with a vase-like shape, rapid growth and stately looks. Other ornamental assets include the foliage, fine texture and attractive bark. Bark is red-brown and cherry-like in youth, turning gray-brown with some exfoliation at maturity. Fall color is yellow-orange-brown with occasional hues of red-purple. It is also very tolerant of urban conditions. Give it room to grow. Recommended cultivars include 'Green Vase', which has a vase shape with vigorous upward arching branches; 'Ogon', which exhibits yellow spring leaves that turn yellow-green by midsummer and amber gold stems that are striking in winter; and 'Village Green', which is oval and has wine-red fall color. ♣



13.

Scott Zanon is the author of *Desirable Trees for the Midwest - 50 for the Home Landscape and Larger Properties*. His new book, *Landscaping with Trees in the Midwest: A Guide for Residential and Commercial Properties* will be released in May by Ohio University/Swallow Press.