

## Grow a diverse landscape

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What is a dirty tree? What is a messy tree? I bet you have a few trees in mind that you would never plant in your landscape because they are dirty or messy, right?

If we are ever to achieve diversity in the landscape, you might want to consider changing your thinking when it comes to plant selection.

As pointed out by one of our recent Tree School speakers, Paul Snyder, horticulturist at Secrest Arboretum in Wooster, we have more plants than ever to choose from today. Our nurseries and growers are producing such a wide selection of plants for the landscape that it's almost tough to decide which to use.

You have read about diversity in the landscape in this column; you may have heard me teach about diversity in a class. You probably realize how important diversity in the landscape is if you have an ash tree and it's dead or dying from the emerald ash borer.

I ask you to drive around your neighborhood and take a look at the landscape plantings. How many different shrubs are being used? How many different trees do you see?

The answer to these questions is, "not many" in most areas. If you are in an urban area or a housing development you will find even less diversity. Landscape contractors tend to plant what they know to be successful.

This usually ends up being all of the same plants such as burning bush, callery pear, honeylocust, taxus, boxwood, and maybe a few spiraea.

The point is that we really need to figure out how to encourage more diversity and to start planting those dirty, messy trees.

I realize people don't like messy crabapple fruit on the sidewalk or to run over sweetgum "balls" or seed pods when they mow.

I know you don't want a walnut tree or hickory that have lots of messy fruit. Or a sycamore that drops big leaves and fruits.

We tend to get into a rut using the same plants over and over because they aren't messy. For instance, commercial plantings tend to consist of honeylocust trees. Lots of them.

The reasoning for planting these throughout an entire parking lot is that they have such small leaves that you don't normally have to rake them – they blow away!

Let's think a little differently about plants and try to achieve diversity in the landscape.

For instance, the fruits of many crabapples are beautiful and well-loved by birds. In fact, there are some really nice newer cultivars that have fruits that persist (don't drop off onto the sidewalk) and are cleaned off by birds.

Sweetgum trees are incredibly beautiful during the fall and provide an excellent shade tree during the summer. Can't we put up with one season of cleaning up the fruits?

We like nice, neat well-maintained landscapes and I understand this. However, if we are ever going to truly achieve diversity in the landscape, we might have to change our way of thinking when it comes to messy!