

Friends of Oakbourne

By Tom Bare, President, Friends of Oakbourne

You may recall that the Friends of Oakbourne (FoO) planted 5 trees in the arboretum in the spring of 2021 (Westtown Gazette, Summer Issue, #38). This fall FoO was able to plant three more dedicated trees, 1 replacement tree, and the first tree in the newly planned rear entrance Water Tower Garden.

A cucumber magnolia (*Magnolia acuminata*) was dedicated by Tim, Gail, and Heather Brien in loving memory and celebration of Matt Brien, who made this world a brighter and better place. This large tree was planted in an open area near the two huge copper beech trees located next to the park's entry drive. The cucumber magnolia is a superb shade/specimen tree that is native to eastern North America and produces greenish-yellow tulip-like flowers in the spring; these flowers turn into red cucumber-like fruits in late summer which release red coated seeds that are used as forage for ground feeding birds and small mammals. This magnolia can reach 40 - 70 feet in height and mature trees have furrowed dark gray-brown bark. Leaves are large (up to 10 inches long), shaped as ovals and turn a golden yellow in the fall.

The Bark Woodlet area (adjacent to the Gaudenzia property and the Oakbourne walking path) is home to trees that have interesting and unusual bark. Continuing this theme, a Firespire American Hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana 'Firespire'*) was planted along the north side of the walking path; this tree was dedicated by friends of the LaFave family in memory of the family of Scott LaFave. This hornbeam variety, in contrast to other native hornbeams, has a narrower more upright form as well as beautiful red-orange fall color. While it produces spring flowers that are not ornamentally significant, these turn into tan hop-like fruit in the early fall. A nickname for this tree is Musclewood, which refers to the characteristic fluted trunk and branches that look like muscle tissue as the tree matures. The silver-blue bark of this hornbeam further provides a nice contrast to the landscape, especially in the winter when snow is on the ground.

The final memorial tree, a tricolor beech (*Fagus sylvatica 'Purpurea Tricolor'*), was dedicated by an anonymous donor(s) and was planted on the north side of the arboretum's dogwood grove which is situated southeast of the mansion. This beech cultivar of the European beech provides stunning variegated leaf foliage (green, purple/pink mixed with white) in the spring and summer months which combine to give the tree a rose colored appearance when viewed from a distance. The leaves are oval and wavy in appearance and turn a burnished bronze color in the fall. Non-showy yellow green flowers appear in the spring which give way to triangular nuts (beechnuts) which ripen in the fall and provide food for birds and mammals. The tricolor beech will grow to a mature size of about 40 feet tall and 30 feet wide.



Cucumber magnolia (Magnolia acuminata) dedicated to Matt Brien



Firespire American Hornbeam (Carpinus caroliniana 'Firespire') dedicated to the family of Scott LaFave



Tricolor beech (Fagus sylvatica 'Purpurea Tricolor') dedicated anonymously

A weeping Serbian spruce tree that FoO planted in the fall of 2020 did not survive the winter and was replaced by another weeping Serbian spruce variety, *Picea omorika* 'Pendula Bruns'; this is a very narrow (about 2 feet wide at maturity) columnar evergreen with weeping closely held branches which will prove a striking feature in our arboretum's landscape as it matures. The terminal leader of this tree does not grow straight up but twists and meanders so that no two mature specimens of this variety look alike.



Weeping Serbian Spruce (Picea omorika 'Pendula Bruns')
Note the twisted terminal leader at the tree top



Serviceberry (Amelanchier x grandiflora 'Autumn Brilliance')
donated by Friends of Oakbourne

The final tree planted this fall was a serviceberry (*Amelanchier x grandiflora* 'Autumn Brilliance', donated by the Friends of Oakbourne) which was located as the first planting in a planned garden at the rear entrance of the water tower. Serviceberries are native to North America and will grow to a height of about 15 - 20 feet. In the spring, pink buds open to provide masses of white flowers on bare branches; the flowers are followed by edible purple berries in June which provide a wonderful food source for birds. The leaves which emerge in the spring are bronze tinted and they gradually mature to a beautiful blue-green fine-toothed oval shape for the summer. Fall color is spectacular with a mix of red and orange tones. The blooming of "serviceberry" flowers were used by early Pennsylvania settlers to mark the time when the ground was due to thaw so that those who had died over the harsh winter could be properly buried with a religious service (hence, the name serviceberry).

Unfortunately, all of the deciduous trees that we planted this fall were past their prime as far as fall colors were concerned so there was little color (or few or no leaves) present on these trees. Next fall should be quite different!

Some park patrons have asked me if it is necessary to keep our newly planted trees and shrubs fenced for years. The answer to this question is most definitely "YES." Deer pressure is very high in the park and over the years (including this year!) we've learned that if the fencing is removed too early, the trees can be damaged not only by deer eating low-hanging foliage, but also by bucks rubbing their antlers on the tree trunks and stripping the bark from the trunk. Once the bark is removed completely around a section of the trunk, the tree will most likely not recover. FoO has experimented over the years with different types of fencing and has settled on metal fence posts fitted with plastic deer netting (4 feet in height).

FRIENDS OF OAKBOURNE

Contact Tom Bare (tmbare@hotmail.com or 610-399-1572) if you are interested in donating a park bench or tree to be planted in Oakbourne Park and Arboretum to honor a special person or loved one or to commemorate an important occasion.