

## Among the Ways to See a Tree

You do not have to be a tree hugger but just a tree appreciator to enjoy the program next Thursday evening, December 9, at 7pm at the Mathews Library when Dr. Jeff Kirwan will speak on the book he co-authored with Nancy Ross Hugo, "Remarkable Trees of Virginia". The format of the book is large, as needed to do justice to the magnificent photographs by Robert Llewellyn. It might be called a coffee table book but I think it is a hard-to-put-down lap book with the lap also host to a child.

This is not only a book about trees; it is a book about teaching children. Not only is Dr. Kirwan a forestry specialist, he is an educator. The cover shows a boy, a running figure alongside a venerable tulip-poplar at Maymont and seeing it you realize that the loss of even one magnificent tree would deprive generations of boys.

Another photograph showing a small girl perched on the burl of an ancient white oak with accompanying text reminds us of the inspiration we receive knowing that although fewer than 1% of acorns escape being eaten and actually sprout, this mighty oak did indeed from an acorn grow. Surely a relationship with a special tree should be every child's heritage. It will ground them in reality as surely as it keeps their grandparents young in heart.

One of the reasons trees have become something to be cleared away for ease in building may be the fact that we don't see them as individual specimens but just as an aggregate blur as we pass them at 70 mph. To reach their intended beauty trees need space. The tulip-poplar, *Liriodendron tulipifera*, for example, tends to grow straight up without branching for tens of feet, requiring plenty of room.

No doubt it is difficult to think large when faced with choosing a tree for a small lot but it is a good investment! Growing up, a friend's house was easily located by reference to the purple beech dominating the front. In this bottom-line world a tree can be the best investment you can make in your home. The next occupant may redo the kitchen, rescue the small bath, enlarge the deck but, unless they have decades, they cannot magically turn that junior dogwood into a senior white oak.

In planting for civic uses or large spaces it is wise to plant a diversity of trees. There is something warmly traditional about the line of the same species bordering a drive or a street. Remember before Isabel the rows of ill-fated and charming Bradford pears? For reasons of climate or health, a row of identical species is an open invitation to the pests that love that particular choice.

New research emphasizes the importance of diversity. We know we need to rely primarily on native plants because they are best suited to our climate but there are other reasons. Native plants support native insects: as we know certain plants attract certain insects which make planning a butterfly garden such a win-win situation. But what we may not realize is that the balance of good versus bad in the bug world can be upset if not enough different plants are there

to feed the good guys who keep down the number of bad guys. In a word, a diverse native plot is a healthy plot.

The New York/Mid-Atlantic Gardener's Book of Lists by Bonnie Appleton and Lois Trigg Chaplin gives a rule of thumb devised by the late Dr. Frank Santamour, tree geneticist with the National Arboretum in Washington, D.C. For planting a streetscape or a commercial or housing development avoid planting more than 30% of plants from any one plant family, more than 20% of plants from one genera or more than 10% of trees from one species.

For example, oaks, *Quercus*, belong to the family Fagaceae, as does the beech. *Quercus* is the genera and it contains about 600 species so you have choices! Oaks come both deciduous and evergreen with huge leaves or small. Some remain a tidy tree shape; others sprawl to shade a picnic.

Investigate having a wonderful tree not found here often enough, the American yellowwood, *Cladrastis kentukea*. It is a native with beautiful white panicles of fragrant flowers in early summer and smooth, silvery bark. It will fit a smaller space as it grows to 30 to 40 feet tall. The small leaflets forming a long leaf are a bright light green turning a clear yellow in fall. Nice.