

The American Elm: The Comeback Kid!

If you are a devotee of crossword puzzles you know the 3-letter answer for 'street shade tree' is 'ELM'. You also know that for many places the shade of elms is but a memory after the onslaught of the Dutch elm disease. There are survivors of course. One such is the New York City elm called 'Dinosaur' by residents under whose shade Gen. George Washington is said to have sheltered during the Revolutionary War? The limbs of aged Dinosaur are literally held up with a length of rope.

Since even the circling fence won't combat the aging process, the city's Parks and Recreation Department is having this and other historic trees cloned. Cuttings will be shipped to an Oregon nursery where they will be grafted onto similar root stock and with luck the saplings will return to the city's streets, a legacy preserved. (The cloning is not the same as dolly-the-sheep cloning but the ancient practice of grafting.)

In general, American elms are being rescued by years of research into less disease prone cultivars. The Dutch elm disease, spread by bark beetles and natural root grafts, destroyed hundreds of thousands of *Ulmus americana*, the graceful vase-shaped deciduous tree with the pretty pendant branch tips.

There is good news for the small towns with Elm Streets! Their namesake tree is being replanted country wide from Pennsylvania Av., DC to townscapes everywhere. Two cultivars, grown on their own rootstock, *Ulmus americana* 'Princeton' and 'Valley Forge' are celebrated for their resistance to DED. Another resistant species is *U. parvifolia*, the lacebark elm with interesting multicolored peeling bark. The *U. parvifolia* elms are more compact than the traditional American elm which makes them useful for narrow sites. They also will grow in the shade of large buildings making them a good choice for urban use.

EATING AND DRINKING AND GARDENING

The school of nutrition science at Tufts University has developed a new 'pyramid' for older adults <hnrc.tufts.edu>. The definition of 'older' is always five years beyond one's present age, a bias that either defines us as optimists or reveals us as chronic liars. This newest pyramid has increased focus on vegetables, especially the leafy greens. Vitamin K is not often adequate in the diets of older people and this vitamin is being studied as a weapon against the inflammation that is a part of diseases such as osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease. Leafy greens, spinach, even lettuce, and most particularly the brassicas, those vegetables related to kale, broccoli, and cabbage are rich in Vitamin K. As well as in green things, it is found in milk, cereal grains, and soybeans.

With increased emphasis on healthy eating comes the not surprising news that prices for good-for-you food have risen more than prices for bad-for-you food. A study at the Univ. of Washington reports that the price of fruits and vegetables has been increasing faster than the rate of inflation. In Seattle, the study showed a 19.5% rise within two years for healthy food and a 1.8% reduction in the price of junk food. Was it Gloria Vanderbilt who was quoted in my youth as saying you can never be too rich or too thin? Seems there IS a connection.

All of the above is an argument for growing a garden. It's spring; let's plant!

About drinking: if you are of the persuasion that water belongs under bridges and that 8 glasses a day is ridiculous, relax. Food can count, such as celery and lettuce: other drinks also count. Tea, tomato juice, skim milk are valuable for hydration. One of the many things that diminish with age is the awareness of being thirsty. Older people really do have to remember to drink the occasional glass of water. Fancy water is no healthier than what comes from the tap. If the local supply tastes of chlorine, add a slice of lemon, or if the condition is frequent, use a simple charcoal filter. Curiously, nutritionists tell us we often eat when we are not hungry but simply unaware that we are thirsty.