

"Nuts – And Other Sundries"

Last week I parked near a black walnut tree and wondered if anyone had the time or patience to gather walnuts and beat and pick the delicious nuts out of those stubborn husks. Inspired by a recipe for black walnut cake, I remember raking them into the driveway hoping the traffic would soften them up. The only thing I made was a mess.

Black walnut, *Juglans nigra*, is native to the eastern United States so we have a lot of them although people do not seem to be deliberately adding them to the landscape. It is a pretty tree and when large enough makes elegant furniture. The leaves are lacy and so the shade is not so dense that nothing will grow under it. Things will grow near it, but just some things! Tomatoes, for example, must be planted at the other end of the property.

It isn't that the tree's roots are poisonous but they are allelopathic. Allelopathy is a sort of antagonism between plant species: plants do not like each other for reasons not completely understood. Black walnut is not the only species that is allelopathic but since we have so many of them, we are more aware of it. The annual sunflower, *Helianthus annuus* is mildly antagonistic but the roots don't spread far and wide so it isn't noticeable that other species do not flourish near it.

Several other vegetables will not grow properly near black walnut, nor will apple and white pine trees along with Rhododendrons and other members of the Ericaceae family. Tech lists plants that do thrive near both the black walnut and the J.regia, the English walnut. The list includes Japanese maples, Catalpa, Canadian hemlock, and even the native pinxterbloom, *Rhododendron periclymenoides*, and two Exbury hybrids, R. 'Gibraltar' and R. 'Baltic'.

Shrubs can safely be planted such as Daphne, Forsythia suspense, and Hibiscus syriacus (Rose of Sharon). Vines include *Lonicera tatarica* (Tatarian honeysuckle) and Virginia creeper. It is a strange list in the May/June 2008 "The Virginia Gardener", since not all cultivars of a species seem immune to the allelopathic effect.

Most herbaceous perennials are a safe choice: the list has astilbe, bellflower, mums, cranebill, daylilies, phlox and hostas.

You can cover the ground with ajuga (bugleweed) or sensitive and cinnamon ferns. Hollyhocks love walnut trees and both violets and pansies are quite at home in the sunny margins of a tree as well as several sedums.

TIPS FROM TECH

Here we are, early October, the time designated by Tech's horticulture research staff as the optimum time to plant a windbrake. Early October through December is the best time for getting trees off to a good start. It is ancient folklore that windbrakes save

money on energy by deflecting winds from the family home. Energy may never be a bargain again so insulation is in order, both inside and outdoors. Check the prevailing winds on your own site as they may differ from those in your general area.

A staggered row of evergreens fairly near the house is excellent protection. You can also vary the effect by using fencing and a small grove of deciduous trees. Deciduous trees on the south side of a home do double duty as they deflect the hot sun in the summer and allow it to enter in the winter when their leaves are gone. NOT NOW BUT LATER...

Is the time to dig Caladium tubers. If you noticed the display of these large handsome tropical leaves around Gloucester's Courthouse circle, you may like to know a bit about how they can be preserved for another season. They will remain colorful for several more weeks but should be dug up just after the first killing frost.

If the foliage yellows and sags before frost, they have lost their charm and you can go ahead and dig them up. Be very careful in digging them since damaging the tuber will allow an entry for fungus troubles. Spread them out on the garage floor or in any well ventilated spot for a few days, a place where they will not be rained on and the temperature is between 60 and 70 degrees.

After they have dried, and the remaining soil gently shaken off, they can be stored in a box covered with sphagnum moss or vermiculite. They should spend the winter where the temperature stays in the low 50s. There really aren't any places around my house with designated temperatures, but an attached garage usually doesn't get much colder than 50 degrees near the furnace. You can swathe them in bubble wrap and hope for the best. Or you can figure everything dies eventually and one of these glorious plants cost no more than a fancy mug of coffee, ergo let them take their chances under a heap of mulch and pore over Brent & Becky's Bulbs catalog and dream of next summer.