

Horticultural Points of Interest – October 2015



Hemlock Woolly Adelgid update

- Non-native aphid relative, sucks nutrients from the tree's needles. Has caused extensive loss of trees in forests from north Georgia to SE Maine, along with disruption to ecosystems.
- Hemlocks in our home landscapes are also vulnerable. You can check your own trees, looking for the tiny white cotton-like balls on underside of branches:



[Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station via Wikipedia]

- Our two recent cold winters may have set these pests back a bit. Several sources claim high mortality with temperatures below zero. But some will survive...
- If these unwanted guests are on your hemlocks, horticultural oil (a.k.a. dormant oil) spray treatment is low toxicity and practical for homeowners unless the trees are large. Best time to treat is early spring before bud break, or low-dose in late spring and late summer. The oil must coat the insect to kill it, so the undersides of needles need to be wet with the oil.
- Insecticidal soaps, like the Safer brand, will also kill adelgids on contact.
- Imidacloprid (e.g. Merit™) is the preferred "big gun" for control. Homeowners can do this or hire a pro. It's applied as a soil drench and then, as a systemic, takes 2-3 months to migrate into the entire plant. But this chemical is one of the neonicotinoids, which have been implicated in die-off of bee colonies. Not sure how risky it is as a systemic.
- Biological control is still in testing, using beetles including ladybug relatives, some from China. Some fungi are also being investigated for HWA control. While there are some positive results, no biological control seems ready for use in forests.

Winter storage of tender bulbs (a refresher course)

- Now that we've had a real freeze (26° low night of Oct 18 in Lynnfield), it's time to dig and store bulbs, tubers, corms, etc. of plants such as:
 - Caladium
 - Canna Lily
 - Dahlia
 - Gladiolus
 - Tuberous Begonia
- Use a spading fork, well back from the crown of the plant, to loosen soil without damaging the bulb or its cousin. Lift the tuber etc. out.
- Cut off the stems at 1-2 inches (Caladium is an exception)
- Gently wash soil off the structure, then dry for several days, not in direct sun and also in above-freezing temperatures. Or wait for soil to dry then brush it off.
- You can store most of these, when they have dried, in a pot or tub, layered with peat or vermiculite. Try to store in the coolest, but never freezing, location. Check on them during the winter; sprinkle with a scant amount of water if bulbs or peat seem very dry.
- Gladiolus corms need a few modifications: (a) don't wash but let soil dry; (b) cure 2-3 weeks a room temperature; (c) remove old corm; (d) store in (labeled!!) paper bags

Harvest berried branches for holiday decoration

- Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) branches can be harvested soon and will keep without water in shed or unheated garage for two months. The birds may have already harvested your berries but if not, you can leave some for them. George Roaf used to harvest huge amounts of this "roadsida."
- American cranberrybush (*Viburnum opulus*) – ours often hold their fruit into late winter, when birds like Cedar Waxwing gorge on them. These cut branches may need to be kept in water; some sources suggest crushing the cut stems to increase water uptake.
- American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*), possibly confused with the controversial Oriental variety. But if used for indoor arrangements, does not matter if the berries / vines are put in the trash rather than composted or pitched into the "back 40."
- Bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*) can be harvested in early Fall and hung to dry.
- Korean dogwood (*Cornus kousa*) has interesting spiked red fruits. If yours needs some pruning for shape you might get a bonus for arrangements.

Fred Ehrhardt

Some resources on the Web:

<http://www.northeastnursery.com/blogs/strategies-for-identifying-and-controlling-hemlock-wooly-adelgid>

<https://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/O&T/trees/note119a/note119a.htm>

<https://www.extension.umd.edu/sites/default/files/docs/programs/ipmnet/FS927-Woody%20cut%20stems-UMD.pdf>

<http://andoverbeacon.com/index.php/14534/holly-winter-berry-and-bittersweet-for-holiday-decorating/>

<http://www.todayshomeowner.com/how-to-store-tender-bulbs-over-the-winter/>

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/garden/yard-garden/flowers/storing-tender-bulbs/>