

Fall Newsletter October 2013

Arboretum in the news! The arboretum is one of central Iowa's best-kept secrets, but I am happy to say this is starting to change, thanks in part to two recent magazine articles. The pieces in *The Iowan* and *ia Magazine* were written by one of our board members, freelance writer Deb Wiley of Des Moines. Read about the arboretum and help spread the word that this is a beautiful destination for quiet enjoyment and so much more.

Welcome new members! Thank you to all who have recently renewed your membership, and especially to those who are new to the arboretum. I hope you take advantage of the many benefits, including free or reduced admission to events and classes here at the Brenton Arboretum, as well as reciprocal free admission at other public gardens throughout the country.

New pocket guide to trees and shrubs is now available! Please stop at the information kiosk at the main entrance to pick one up and sign the guestbook too. This updated map is complete with trees and shrubs that have been added to the collections, as well as changes to the trails. You will also find a detailed map of our signature crabapple collection. This time of year, it is worth a special trip to see the stunning fruit displays.

Let's talk about planned giving. My friend David said a few weeks ago when comparing planned giving to oak trees: "For planting is a matter of hope for years to come, which might make the difference in the life of just one. Those who will see it will appreciate the shade. And maybe they will follow the example you have made." This helped me start a conversation with my husband about how our annual gift could be made perpetual, and to realize how satisfying it is to know we might make a difference in the lives that follow ours.

Master planning update: The plan for the Eddy Glen (formerly known as the Stine Addition) is slowly getting underway. Last spring, a meadow mix was planted in the northeast section of the parcel where 260th Street curves. This East Meadow will be mown for three years before growing into a colorful display of select native grasses and wild flower species. "Why a meadow, and not a prairie?" you might ask.

A prairie, as defined by the Iowa Prairie Network, is an ecosystem mostly of grasses and forbs (flowering plants) interdependent with other fauna, fungi, the soil, geology, and fire. The prairie is an intricate web with more of its living mass below ground—in the deep roots of the grasses and flowering plants—than we can see above ground.

A meadow is a broader term referring to a field vegetated primarily by grasses and forbs, often after being left fallow for a period of time. The vegetation may occur naturally or artificially. Thus, the East Meadow of the Eddy Glen will provide a colorful transitional groundcover until our collections are expanded into this area during a later



Autumn foliage of the shingle oak, *Quercus imbricaria*. Photo by Craig Shives.

phase of the project. In the meantime, invasive woody plants are being removed from the Glen to prepare for next phases. Stay tuned!

Volunteer opportunities abound. I was recently asked what type of work does an arboretum volunteer do. Oh, where to begin! I asked what her interests were, which led to a conversation about numerous volunteer possibilities. Go to our website, www.thebrentonarboretum.org/support/volunteer, to see a list. A sincere **THANK YOU** to those special members who help us year after year with mowing, tagging, weeding, photography and so much more. One of our volunteers, Craig Shives, now comes out weekly to photograph the arboretum.

“The Brenton Arboretum is a jewel in our midst. I discovered it in the Fall of 2010 while driving the countryside on a beautiful autumn day. I picked up a brochure listing volunteer opportunities and made a mental note to follow-up the next Spring. While most of my “follow-up” notes never experience an actual follow-up, this one did. For the last two and one-half years I have been roaming the Arboretum on nearly a weekly basis in an effort to photograph all the trees and shrubs in all the seasons. It is a large task, but it is an exciting and gratifying undertaking. Volunteering at the Arboretum is ideal for anyone who likes nature and spending time outdoors. You will find a staff passionate about trees and the mission of the Arboretum. I highly recommend the experience.”

Outreach continues for children. As I write this letter, a mob of happy first-graders is invading the Vista Room for a sack lunch before heading back to school after a morning of learning. In unison, they enthusiastically tell me about the seeds and trees they saw today. So far this year, our programs have touched 964 children. With your continued support, we will continue to remove the barriers such as transportation and a lack of awareness of our programs, which prevent them from experiencing nature at the arboretum.



Local first graders busy learning about trees under the Pavilion. Photo by Lee Goldsmith.

Seasonal characteristics of the trees such as spring blooms and fall color are easy to notice when on display. I know most of us may not want to think about it just yet, but even winter reminds us of characteristics that we may have forgotten about, such as the rugged, almost spooky outline of *Catalpa* (sometimes called the Halloween tree), the colorful exfoliating bark of *Betula*, or the bright yellow *Salix* twigs that gracefully drape to the ground. And let’s not forget about the conifers that add structure and contrast to the winter landscape. I invite you to visit the arboretum in every season, especially fall and winter, to study the characteristics that are on display at that time.

Good luck, Lee! Lee Goldsmith is stepping away from her position as director of education & outreach. During Lee’s tenure, educational offerings expanded, volunteer programs grew, and new events were added. Please join me in wishing her the best of luck with her new endeavors.



Green hickory nuts from the shagbark hickory, *Carya ovatus*. Photo by Andy Schmitz.

It's the year of the hickory!

By Andy Schmitz, Director of Horticulture & General Manager

The Brenton Arboretum grows all the native Iowa hickories, including shagbark, bitternut, shellbark, pecan, mockernut, and pignut. This year three of these species are in fruit at the arboretum.

Our pecan trees have produced nuts for a few years now, but for the first time at the arboretum, we have seven shagbark hickory trees and five bitternut hickory trees in fruit.

I read that it takes 15 to 20 years for a hickory to grow from a seed to fruiting tree. One of our shagbark hickories (tree #2003-139) was

collected from a wild tree in Black Hawk County, Iowa, in the fall of 2001. A mere thirteen growing seasons after a seed was planted in the spring of 2002, it's producing nuts!

You can view this fine specimen at the northwest corner of Overlook Pond along with several other fruiting shagbark hickory trees growing there.

The bitternut hickory trees are located in the southwest corner of the arboretum. If you are over there, take a look at tree #1998-182, which has more than 100 nuts visible at eye level. Stop by to see the fruits soon, then definitely return to view the exceptional, clean-yellow fall color of the bitternut hickory.

The pecan trees are just east of the bitternuts, and several of those accessions are fruiting as well. Hopefully, we will not have to wait too many more years before the shellbark, mockernut, and pignut trees set seed.

Writing about and looking at all these gorgeous hickory nuts got me thinking of my favorite pie, pecan. I'll have to get my Grandma's recipe, the one she always made for Thanksgiving dinner, but instead of pecan pie, I'll probably make hickory pie, as all the nuts of these species are edible. However, some are not as sweet as others, especially the bitternut hickory. The meat of this nut is edible, but bitter.

Watch for Andy's column on the importance of provenance in the Spring 2014 newsletter.

In closing, keep your eye on us as we continue our mission-driven work that endeavors to connect people with the natural world of trees. Your continued support makes it all possible. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Lynn Kuhn
Executive Director

P.S. As you ponder your holiday gift giving, remember an arboretum membership is perfect for a loved-one, co-worker or friend you want to experience one of Iowa's best-kept secrets.

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