

President's MESSAGE

Diversity

The WAA has great diversity in its members; their location throughout the state, the clientele they serve, and the jobs they perform.

We are not only diverse, but most of us would agree how important it is to preach the need for species diversity in our urban forests.

Yet, so many of our urban forests are still plagued with monocultures. In fact, the ash is the second most planted street tree in the nation.

And so it would appear that even though we preach that different species should be used in our planning and subsequent planting of any area, we have failed to make this a reality.

Why is this? Are there enough species available for us to diversify? Are we practicing what we preach?

Many researchers around the country are developing new varieties of woody plants for our future use. Cornell University has developed a new cloning technique, clonal propagation, that allows oaks to develop their own root systems rather than growers using the traditional and difficult grafting method.

Ornamental plant breeder Peter C. Podaras has been collaborating with the Landscape Plant Development Center and the Cornell group. He has also been cross-breeding native northern white oaks with white oak species from the southeast and southern midwest parts of the United States. He is also using oaks from North Africa, Asia and the Mediterranean – WOW!

Another group, The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF), has been working over 20 years to develop a variety that looks and acts like the traditional American chestnut, but will resist the blight that plagued American chestnuts 50–100 years ago. They feel they are close, but availability is years away.

However, plant breeding is an inexact science and art. Dr. Laura Jull of the University of Wisconsin reminded me that woody plants are very heterozygous, making it hard to predict what one will get when breeding. However, this is also a benefit, as one may discover some recessive gene trait that is expressed when breeding, such as a new purple-leaf cultivar, weeping form, increased resistance to a particular pest or greater cold hardiness.

All this work takes time and money! I urge you to support the TREE Fund and our future researchers. Please attend our annual conference, buy those raffle tickets, and support our Wisconsin Tour des Trees riders. But equally as important, attend the conference to learn how to manage emerald ash borer and how to implement and maintain urban forest diversity.

As someone said years ago, “Aspire to inspire before you expire!”

Work safely and be blessed.

Dave Graham

