

Overused and Underutilized Landscape Plants

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INTRODUCTION

Our landscapes have lost diversity. When considering the limited variety of species and selections that are currently being used in the landscape, the development of relative monocultures becomes apparent. This is disheartening considering the sheer number of viable landscape plants available that could be utilized.

It is an easy scenario to fall into. Take the introduction of Knockout® Roses, which is an extraordinary plant. Their disease resistance, ease of propagation and long bloom period make them an ideal candidate for the landscape. The problem arises when they are used in almost every landscape as a monoculture. This leads to the explosion of pests or diseases, such as Rose Rosette; or increases the severity of effects from introduced maladies through a greater loss of mature specimens. Examples of the latter are the overplanting of Ash trees with their susceptibility to the Emerald Ash Borer, and the devastation of Elms to Dutch Elm Disease.

So why do we not diversify our plant palette in production? The answer is, more often than not - financial. It is difficult to allocate space and dollars to a plant species

that customers are not actively requesting. I am not certain how to overcome this obstacle. It is necessary to address, but perhaps not in this particular presentation.

All the above is not to imply we grow poor selections now. That could not be further from the truth. *Hydrangea paniculata* is a great species of plant for production. Given the plant's ease of propagation, ability to be maintained and lack of significant diseases and pests, it has all the characteristics we need to create a profitable plant. This is but one example. The next step is to not over-produce the item and flood landscapes with them.

Following are some plants that I feel are landscape worthy, but seem to be missing from production in sufficient numbers:

Platanus x acerifolia 'Suttneri' has variegated leaves, which really does not matter since the foliage is out of eyesight. The branching of this hybrid is typical but has a very striking white bark which really stands out in the landscape.

Platanus x acerifolia **Exclamation!**® has excellent branching and a high resistance to leaf anthracnose (Figure1).



Figure 1. *Platanus x acerifolia* Exclamation!™

Platanus occidentalis Silverwood™ was selected by John Nickel, owner of Greenleaf Nursery, out of a sycamore allee in Tulsa, OK. While it maintains the typical branching and size habits of the species, Silverwood reveals bright white bark after it exfoliates during the growing season (Figure 2).

Sophora japonica is a species of tree that deserves more attention. I have seen issues with cankers developing after being transplanted bareroot. It has been my observation that growing the liners in a container then planting into a field production system will alleviate canker issues to a significant degree.



Figure 2. *Platanus occidentalis* Silverwood™.

Sophora japonica ‘Gardiner’s Weeping’ is a pendulous form found at the entrance of Bernheim Arboretum in Clermont, KY. I placed the name of Gardiner’s Weeping on this plant to note its more prolific flowering tendencies when compared to others. Propagation seems to be best with either bench grafting or spring budding.

Sophora japonica ‘Winter Gold’ sports chartreuse foliage during the growing season and bright yellow bark during the winter (Figure 3). This form is somewhat “twiggy” when young, so some correctional pruning for a solid central leader is necessary during the first year. Propagation is the same as described above.



Figure 3. *Sophora japonica* 'Winter Gold'.

Metasequoia glyptostroboides 'Amber Glow' is an improvement over 'Ogon'. It has yellow foliage that holds up better to bleaching when exposed to bright sunlight (Figure 4). Unlike many yellow-foliaged plants, 'Amber Glow' still has the same level as vigor as the straight species - making it a quick-to-finish plant in production.

Hydrangea arborescens **Invincibelle® Wee White** is a dramatic improvement over Annabelle. Wee White has a much smaller stature, struggling to reach 46cm (18-in.) tall x 61 cm (24-in.) wide in the container. The foliage stays clean with little leaf spotting, and without the sporadic leaf dying, characteristic of Annabelle. This selection also has heavier flowering tendencies than other available *arborescens* selections.



Figure 4. *Metasequoia* 'Amber Glow'.

Hydrangea arborescens 'Haas Halo' is a lacecap hydrangea with some serious flower power! While a lacecap flower style is not what the public typically prefers, this selection would definitely change their mind. A regular sized plant, 'Haas Halo' produces a good number of flowers with each flower being extraordinarily large.

Adina rubella is an unknown shrub that has some very admirable characteristics. The foliage on this species is fine in texture and glossy in appearance. Sporadically throughout the growing seasons, buttonbush-like flowers appear. As fall approaches, the foliage turns an excellent maroon color which persists for an extended period. There is an opportunity for breeding a more compact, heavier flowered plant if one could find viable seed.

Viburnum carlesii Sugar N' Spice™ displays a significant improvement over the typical species (Figure 5). While the flower clusters are about 1/3 smaller than normal, the sheer quantity make up for the size in effect. The high flower count leads to another characteristic that makes this plant a production gem. The branching on 'Sugar N' Spice' make the cull rate rather low on a species that is typically very high.



Figure 5. *Viburnum carlesii* 'Sugar N' Spice™

Microbiota decussata 'Fuzzball' is a subtle winner. Separating itself from the crowd, Fuzzball exhibits significantly less loss during the growing season when compared to the species along with better winter color that does not bronze. Liners are hard to find right now.

Indigofera heterantha should be used more. This plant has excellent drought tolerance and few pest or disease issues. The fine-textured blue-green foliage is quite attractive. Purple flower spikes begin around the first of June and continue until about Mid-August. It is best used as a cutback shrub in the landscape.

Echinacea 'Southern Belle' is a standout (Figure 6). When visiting Mt. Cuba Center in August of this year, this selection was still in full bloom - while every other coneflower was brown and well past its peak. A double flower with deep, bright magenta petals. Unfortunately, I have yet to find liners of this plant in the trade.



Figure 6. *Echinacea* 'Southern Belle'.

Amelanchier sp. (weeping form) is located at Simpson Nursery in Vincennes, Indiana. I am not aware of a cultivar name for this plant, but it does truly have a pendulous habit. This particular selection is quite susceptible to the various diseases that attack this species; however, it does offer some good breeding material with some of the more resistant cultivars.

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