

Keep a lookout for new-to-you tree varieties

By Larry Williams*

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Have you ever bought something that was not really new but you called it new because it was new to you? In considering this question; you-may think of an automobile, a home, furniture and such - but what about a tree?

In today's article, I'll share a list of "new" trees compiled by Gary Knox, Extension Specialist and professor of Environmental Horticulture with the University of Florida. Knox recently assembled this list based on his observations and experiences as well as the expertise of other plant enthusiasts. Knox provides the following definitions of a "new plant" in reference to the list of trees below:

"New plants" often refer to those that have been little used (such as winged elm) or were previously unknown (as with discoveries of "new" magnolias in China). "New" also includes improved forms of "old" plants resulting from selecting superior forms of the plant (as with new cultivars of Southern magnolia) or from formal breeding programs (as with disease-resistant crape myrtles).

"New" also may refer to plants that are now available in marketable numbers: This may have resulted from advances in propagation that allows more plants to be produced (for example, new techniques to root cuttings of live oak).

Alternatively, the numbers of plants simply may have increased slowly through conventional propagation and there now are sufficient stock plants throughout the industry that significant numbers of the plant can be propagated and sold (for example, cultivars of red maple): "New plants" be those that are rediscovered. Plants go in and out of style just like clothing. As an example, hydrangeas are now back in vogue.

Finally plants that were formerly underutilized, such as many native plants, may find new and expanded roles in current landscapes thanks to our ever-changing lifestyles and greater appreciation of gardening.

Within the constraints of these definitions and personal biases, Knox identifies the following as "new trees" worthy of producing in the nursery and using in the landscape:

Acer rubrum 'Somerset' is a lesser-known cultivar of red maple that has performed better than many others in a planting of red maple cultivars at Tifton, Ga. The red maple cultivars October Glory[®] Autumn Flame[®], Fairview Flame[®] and Autumn Fantasy[®] also performed well. Two other maples, Florida maple and Chalk maple, are underutilized natives that form small trees and display good fall color. Their scientific names are in question, but are often listed as *Acer barbatum* (Florida maple) and *Acer leucoderme* (Chalk maple).

Sweet gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) has long been admired for its form and fall color but is widely disliked due to the messy and spiny fruit. The cultivar 'Rotundiloba' is a fruitless sweet gum that should overcome any obstacle to its wider use.

Live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) is a beloved tree in the South but the necessity of planting seed-grown live oaks resulted in trees with variable sizes and habits. New techniques for rooting live oak cuttings have allowed growers to select cultivars of live oak with improved form and uniform growth characteristics. Cultivars that are now being marketed include Highrise[®], Millenaire, Southern Shade[®] and Shadowlawn.

Crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia* species) has become a widely used plant thanks to breeders who developed crape myrtles with improved flower color; ornamental bark, various habits and disease resistance. However, out of the cultivars that have been released, several superior cultivars of myrtle have been overlooked. Apalachee is the best lavender flowered tree-type crape myrtle and has a dense *canopy*, upright habit and outstanding cinnamon-colored bark. Choctaw has large panicles of light pink flowers on a fast-growing, vase shaped tree. 'Caddo' grows up to 10 feet tall and wide and features bright "bubble-gum" pink" flowers.

Despite the fact that I can easily share with you these "new" trees as described by Dr. Knox, I can't promise you they are easily found. It takes for the nurseries to grow and then market new plants: but in time, you will eventually see some of these "new" trees at a nursery near you.

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