The Year in Trees and Words: Book Note and Excerpt

The Year in Trees: Superb Woody Plants for Four-Season Gardens. Kim E. Tripp and J. C. Raulston. Timber Press, 1995. 204 pages with 206 color plates. Hardcover. $44.95

J. C. Raulston, director of the North Carolina State University Arboretum and a man of many adages, holds that in any given region of the United States, 40 trees and shrubs make up more than 90% of the landscape plantings. If, as he also asserts, somewhere in this country as many as 15,000 different landscape plants are available for the finding, then why do we see the same few over and over? Twenty years ago Raulston started the Arboretum at NCSU to ameliorate this situation by testing the garden-worthiness of a wide range of plants. A recent count of plants collected and evaluated numbered 9,000; having identified some of the most viable and attractive, the next task was to encourage their production and use.

To that end, during Kim Tripp's postdoctoral stint at the NCSU Arboretum, one of her weekly chores was a press release in the form of a plant portrait. Those portraits—150 in total—have been joined to 206 handsome color photos, mostly by Raulston, in *The Year in Trees: Superb Woody Plants for Four-Season Gardens.* Those who've heard either Raulston or Tripp speak know that they possess a wealth of information, especially on plant adaptation and response to climate.* This is a book for the plant lover, a celebration of trees and shrubs that's solid and informative enough for a place on the reference shelf. Although the NCSU Arboretum primarily tests plants for hardiness in the warm, moist summers of USDA zone 7, many of them grow well in New England. A sampling of Tripp's portraiture follows.

Corylus avellana 'Contorta': Harry Lauder's walking stick

There just is no escaping it—eventually, at some level or another, all gardeners succumb to the quest for the rare and unusual. This yen may manifest as the drive to find and rescue the rarest of native populations of a tiny fern with only five remaining plants that grow in only one spot on the entire planet (currently endangered, of course, by planned construction of a transglobal shopping mall) or it may develop as an insatiable hunger for a cutting of that dwarf, contorted, pink-and-gold-variegated, cutleaved, sterile, chartreuse-flowered form of a hitherto-believed-to-be-extinct, cold hardy to zone 1, heat-tolerant, broadleaved evergreen shrub rumored to now exist only in the collections of the extremely remote Atlantis Botanic Garden (a garden known only to a few seriously intrepid collectors, which refuses to participate in Index Semina exchanges).

Whatever form this yearning for the unusual takes, even the most blasé of horticulturists eventually find themselves searching for choice plants of one form or another. One magnificent plant that has long been a traditional source of choice garden character is *Corylus avellana* 'Cortorta', Harry Lauder's walking stick. This unusual shrub or small tree is a contorted form of the commercial European filbert, *Corylus avellana,* which is grown and highly valued for its delicious nuts. The

* See "Exploring the Complexities of Plant Hardiness" by J. C. Raulston and Kim E. Tripp in the Fall 1994 *Arnoldia* (54:3).

GARY L. KOLLER

branching of this form is twisted into striking, spiral contortions throughout the entire plant. It is a spectacular addition to the winter garden, where the sculptural patterns created by the branches can be clearly seen.

Native to Europe and parts of Asia and northern Africa, the species *Corylus avellana* is a small tree or large, woody, multistemmed, thicket-forming shrub. Its deciduous dark green foliage, about 3–4 inches (7.6–10.1 cm) long and almost as wide, is rather coarse and hairy. The flowers are tiny, with the male flowers borne on long, narrow catkins, and female flowers in shorter, thicker catkins, similar to those of its close relatives the birches (*Betula* spp.) and alders (*Alnus* spp.). The catkins of male flowers are yellow and put on a handsome show in late winter before the leaves emerge. The female flowers are much more subtle and require closer inspection to see the delicate but amazingly carmine-colored floral parts emerging from the buds.

Corylus avellana 'Contorta' is much like its parent species with one important exception—its contorted growth. This fascinating plant is interesting in summer because the leaves are also somewhat contorted, but it is at its peak in late winter and early spring. It does not bear fruit. The plant will reach 10 feet (3.1 m) with some age, but it is a relatively slow grower, which makes it an excellent specimen plant for small gardens. It is completely hardy to zone 4.

Corylus avellana 'Contorta' will perform well in a range of soils in full sun or with a little shade. It is propagated by grafting scion wood of the cultivar onto rootstock of the species. The species understock tends to sucker and the suckers must be continually removed to avoid overgrowth of the cultivar.