

DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

Planting for the future

BY SIOUX ROGERS

Remember when your ma and pa told you to put your pennies or nickels in the piggy bank? They were teaching you to save for your future. Today, we would need to put \$1,000 bills in the piggy bank to save for the future. Some of us did that, and look what happened—the pigs ate it all up. What would have happened if we had been planting nut trees? We now would be enjoying our own foresight and it would be multiplying. Nobody would be eating our nuts, just us.

My mother in most certain terms was *not* a gardener, thereby proving I was obviously found under a romaine lettuce leaf. But at age 89 Mom decided to plant a three-foot-tall magnolia tree. The tree had a potential growth height of 20 to 30 feet. She knew that. Mom never lived long enough to see the tree flower or grow more than a few feet. She never expected to. So why don't we think like my mom? She just thought that maybe the next "new folks" on the block would like a large magnolia tree. A few years ago I visited that tree, now holding its tall glorious own, just to say, "hi" to my mom.

The following list is focused on nut trees only. My garden mentor, Grandma Olga, was a "nut," which is most likely where I inherited my sometimes-eccentric qualities. This column is dedicated with love and endearment to Grandma Olga.

To see a complete list of recommended new, alternative or underutilized fruit trees recommended by OSU, go to <http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/cropmap/oregon/crop/treefruit.html>.

I have chosen to focus on just the following three trees:

1. Almond (*Prunus amygdalus*) is related to the peach tree. Think of it as an "inside-out" peach. With the peach, you eat the juicy flesh and spit out the seed or make a peach-pit necklace and earring set. Oh heck, just spit out the peach seed. The almond is just the opposite. You throw away the basically inedible (actually I've never tried nibbling it) outer flesh and eat the inner seed. That is what we know as an almond. As with almost everything (cars,

jewelry, people, ice cream, dogs, cats and nut trees), there are hundreds of varieties. Some do fine living alone, like, well you know what I was going to say (a hermit), and some need a pollinator—a real good buddy so to speak. Most almonds trees need pollinators to make edible almonds. Some, like Marianna (check out Raintree Nursery, Washington), a self-fertile, soft-shelled, sweet almond tree, don't need a boyfriend. I have an almond tree that actually has terrible almonds, which is fine since it turns out I am allergic to those nuts. To make up for that bad deal, and since she is otherwise very healthy, I did not have her bodily removed. In return, each spring I am gifted with a bounty of sweet-smelling, flowering pink branches.



The fruit of a chestnut is contained in a spiny (very sharp) cupule also called "bur" or "burr." The burrs are often paired or clustered on the tree branch and contain one to seven nuts.

Photo: <http://4.bp.blogspot.com>.

Cutting the branches for our house or giving them away for "happy nothing day" is a wonderful trade-off for not being able to eat the nuts.

2. Butternut (*Juglans cinerea* L.). This is not a squash but actually the hardiest nut in the walnut family, sorta like the "little but tougher brother." Funny that this tree has a "squash" name. Because the wood of this tree is very light in color and often used for elegant furniture and paneling, it is sometimes called "white walnut," a more descriptive name. Even the shape of this white walnut tree is quite

different than the black walnut. The black walnut (*Juglans nigra*) is a large deciduous tree attaining heights of 98 to 130 feet. (A point of interest is that, reportedly, one of the largest black walnut trees in the entire country is right here in southern Oregon on Beall Road in Central Point.) The English walnut *Juglans regia* is also a large, deciduous tree attaining heights of 80 feet to possibly over 100 feet with optimum conditions.

The butternut tree shell ends in a sharp point, and the nut has a gentle buttery flavor. It does get lonely and it needs a mate, i.e., a pollinator, to make wee nuts that can grow big and healthy like ma and pa. The butternut tree is not as thirst-driven as its cousin the black walnut, but also does not grow as large.

The website of Stark Bro's nursery states this about its grafted butternut tree: "An overachiever outgrows and out-bears any nut tree we know! This impressive variety yields bountiful crops of mild-flavored nuts that are easy to shell and perfect for eating fresh or baking. Cold-tolerant. Bears in 2-3 years. Matures to be 40-50' tall. Ripens in late August to late September. Grafted. Self-pollinating."

3. Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*, also known as *C. vesca*, *C. vulgaris*, *Fagus castanea*). This deciduous tree grows to 98 feet tall by 49 feet wide. Its growth rate is moderate, it's hardy up to Zone 5 and not frost-tender, especially once established. Here's great news, especially for our local region: it's an excellent soil-enriching understory in pine forests. Cool! This underrated tree is not very fussy about where it grows. It loves well-drained soil in a sunny location, but will also grow in a sandy, loamy or clay soil, and even in nutritionally poor soil. It likes soil with either neutral or acid pH,



Sioux Rogers—And the beet goes on.

which is why it thrives in pine forests. *Castanea sativa* complains only when soil is too high in calcium. So feeding with milk shakes is a no-no. Basically, sun and water are the optimum requests until well-established. Hybrids of American and Chinese chestnuts are blight-resistant and produce straight trunks as well as large nuts.

Ah, its flowers (which show in July), look, well, like spiked green balls from outer space. The seeds ripen in October and, at least to me, are among the most beautiful of all nut seeds, resembling highly polished morsels of wood. To top that, they are a delicious and versatile ingredient in many dishes. Now, about the flowers, they are monoecious. This means that any particular flower can be either male or female. Not sure how that decision is made but both sexes live happily together on the same tree. Before you jump to the wrong conclusion, they both need the bees for pollination. And the bees fortunately love chestnut trees. This is a good thing since the bees don't need to travel so far or work too hard looking for pollinator partners. Flowers are produced on wood of the current year's growth.

The oldest documented *Castanea sativa* is in England's Kew Gardens. Its estimated to be 300 years old.

That's all folks. Remember that Arbor Day is Friday, April 26, 2013, so plant a nut tree in memory or in honor of someone near and dear.

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Sioux Rogers
541-846-7736
mumearth@dishmail.net

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