

# Nursery Musings



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Just when we thought it was going to be full on summer, we have another cool break in the weather and we are back to long pants and fleece jackets. I am not a tomato or melon plant that likes hot weather so I'm OK with putting on my jacket. The good news with the cool weather is that it is great for planting. Newly planted plants are happier when they can have a cool respite to get settled in. Keep in mind that newly planted trees, shrubs, and perennials need to be watered as if they are still in the pot through the first hot summer. This means daily attention and you need to be vigilant until they get their roots established the first year into to next year.

Many folks ask "when is the best season to plant?" The best time to plant is when you can get the job done with a few considerations. Just like most other gardening topics there is no one right answer and as usual I have 10 or 20 questions to ask. "How

are you going to water and are you going to be home all summer to water?" is probably the most critical question. We know that water for the grass is NOT enough for a tree so if your planting depends on you for the additional water and you are going to be on vacation you may want to consider your planting time for when you will be home. At the nursery we sell potted plants that have been grown in the pots and are good to plant at any time of the year. The ball and burlap plants we sell have been dug in the proper dormant season and can also be planted at any time that you can manage the water.

Tree planting is one of those topics that when you talk to 3 people you will get 5 answers. Golly, wouldn't you think after all this time we would have a 100% plan? That takes us back to the 10 or 20 questions. In theory, here are the benefits of fall planting: cooler weather, hopeful for fall moisture, tree going dormant that allows for root growth without having to support the leaves, and hopeful for winter and spring moisture



before the first hot summer. The theory of early spring planting is similar: hopeful for some rain and trees are dormant or just leafing out so they have some time for root development before the first hot summer.

Now for something completely different. Many folks are familiar with mugo pines and what a great evergreen bush they can be. Many folks also know that they have seen mugo pines that got too large for the spot they were planted when they really wanted a small bush. Dwarf in the mugo pine world generally means 5-6' tall. What folks are often looking for are the True Dwarf mugo pines that will stay small over the next 20 years. We have a variety called Valley Cushion that will be 1' x 4' wide in 15-20 years. We also have Slowmound that will be 4' x 6' wide in 15-20 years and Pumilio that I have seen get 6' x 8' wide in 20 years. If you want to prune your mugo it is best to do so over several years by trimming out the new candles or making pruning cuts that are hidden by other needles. Mugs do not respond well to being given a buzz haircut. The right mugo for the right spot can give the effect of a living stone in your flower bed or rock garden.

If pines are not your thing, consider the globe spruce options. Little Gem Norway spruce is a tight ball shape will be 1' x 2' wide with bright green spring candles that mature to a deep spruce green. Pumila

Norway spruce will be 4' x 4' with a bit more open branching pattern. Elegans Norway spruce will be 2' x 4'. Mrs. Cesarini Colorado spruce is a green variety and will be 3' x 4'. St. Mary's Broom Colorado spruce is a blue variety that will be 1' x 2' that has an outward spreading habit. We also have Globe Colorado spruce that can get 6' x 6' in 20 years. Spruce and pines must be planted in full sun with good drainage so the slope of a berm in your yard in full sun would be the perfect spot. If you like upright weeping spruce we have a cool and funky selection.

Folks have been asking me about fertilizing trees. I prefer not to fertilize with nitrogen the first year they are planted. A starter fertilizer with low nitrogen like a 3-10-3 or a phosphate like 0-45-0 never hurts but I like to avoid a 20-20-20 on trees. Keep in mind that it is best not to fertilize any trees after July 1. If you push too much new growth this late the growth could be damaged in the first early freeze and you will have done more harm than good.

The rose blooms have been outstanding! Most of the rose varieties we sell are repeat bloomers if you dead head the spent flowers. Our cool wet weather has brought on some black spot for many folks. Treat with a fungicide labeled for roses and clean up any affected leaves. We are also seeing blooms on the water lily. It turns out that water lily need the water to be around



60 degrees for the blooms to come out. Each bloom lasts 3 - 5 days and opens in the morning and closes in late afternoon. The lindens and Japanese tree lilacs are also blooming right now.

If you are a plant detective geek and like to research various problems be sure to check out the MSU Extension Urban IPM Alerts website: <https://mturbanalert.org>. They have great info on local Montana plant and insect issues. You can also sign up to receive their alerts. (The latest alert discusses herbicide injury to ornamental plants.) They also offer links to other Extension publications for continued discussion. One last thing, if you are concerned about pine bark beetles this is the time they start to fly. The Montana DNRC has an informative discussion: <http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/forestry/forestry-assistance/pest-management/bark-beetle-pheromones>. If you are not an internet person, stop by the nursery to pick up a print out.



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