

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 10/31/01), ©2005

Happy Halloween! I wish I knew some scary gardening stories to tell you. Of course we've all seen some pretty scary weeds in our gardens haven't we? This is actually my very favorite time of year. I think it's because it's the only season when I'm able to spend quality time in my own garden.

Right now my husband and I have been haunting all our local nurseries looking for plants to form a natural hedge across the front of our property. We'll be combining rhodies, azaleas, evergreen and deciduous small trees and shrubs; and we'll pop in some bulbs, herbs, perennials and grasses. It's quite exciting. We love an excuse to go out and buy more plants.

The trick to the whole process is that we don't want anything that will get above fifteen to twenty feet tall. And we all know that when we read a nursery tag that says, "grows ten to twenty feet" it's always wise to double that height. The other day a tag read "eighteen feet tall." "Where do they get these numbers?!" my husband and the nurseryman exclaimed together.

Over the last year we took out about thirty-five fir trees that were butchered into a hedge. (We inherited them with the house we bought eight years ago.) It took about a year before we decided what to do with the space. Several weeks ago we hauled in a soil compost mix and my husband and a friend rented a bobcat to berm up the soil all across the front of our property.

The first thing we'll do is plant very slow growing evergreen trees and move some large rhodies up from another area of our garden. When these anchoring plants are in place we'll add quite a few deciduous small trees and/or shrubs for extra color and texture. My husband's choices are a few smaller Japanese maples. My choices are ribes (red currant) and red and yellow twig dogwood. We'll also add some hydrangeas. For shorter clumping and mounding plants on both the front and back of the berm, we'll plant grasses or carex and include some azaleas and autumn heathers. We might even throw in some dwarf rosemary, Spanish lavender or flower carpet roses.

We bought three *Tsuga mertensiana* (Mountain Hemlock) and grouped them at a corner of the berm. In the mountains *T. mertensiana* reach a height of 50 to 90 feet. This fact made us quite nervous, until everyone (nursery professionals and a tree expert who shall remain nameless at this time) assured us they won't get much taller than twenty feet at the very most in our garden. The tag said "ten to twenty feet." They better be right or we're going to be very disappointed. I'll report in on their growth next year.

We've also purchased a *Cupressus arizonica* (blue ice) also known as Arizona Cypress. The foliage is a white-blue-green and is quite lacy. The branches are nearly maroon. It's one of my favorite trees so far. This is actually the second time we've purchased this tree. A very sweet, cute neighbor boy got his small hands on a pair of hand pruners and helpfully pruned off nearly all the front growth of our first Arizona Cypress several months ago. Our neighbor graciously took the tree to plant in his garden and is buying us our new one. Thank you Brian and Robbie. We love you guys.

"Sunset Western Garden Book" is invaluable when researching plants to purchase. "Trees and Shrubs for Temperate Climates" by Gordon Courtright (Timber Press \$29.95) and "Champion Trees of Washington State" by Robert Van Pelt (University of Washington Press \$16.95) are great resource books when determining the growing patterns and conditions for trees and shrubs. The Courtright book is a "right plant-right place" resource book for our growing conditions and shows hundreds of color photos so you'll see how the tree or shrub will look in your own landscape. The champion trees book tells the maximum size of various trees growing in Washington state.

Happy Halloween and I hope you'll get out there and treat yourselves to a few autumnal plant purchases.

*Send any questions or comments to Peg at [gardenmentor@yahoo.com](mailto:gardenmentor@yahoo.com) or in care of this newspaper.*