

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 4-28-04) Ginkgo Tree, ©2005

April 17 to celebrate Arbor Day and Earth Day fifty volunteers planted trees at Nelson Park in Poulsbo. A Ginkgo biloba was planted in honor of my incredible sister Jackie for her many years of service to the citizens of Poulsbo. Bess Bronstein, Poulsbo Tree Board member said, "You should write a column about Ginkgos." This column's for you, Bess and Jackie.

Ginkyo (in both Chinese and Japanese) means "silver apricot" with gin meaning silver and kyo meaning apricot. The fruit is eaten in Japan. Biloba means "two-lobed" describing the leaves. The name has been changed to Ginkgo. Some literature says the botanist's handwriting was misinterpreted with y becoming g.

Ginkgos date back to nearly 200 million years. They have changed very little since those times. Fossil remains of Ginkgo show they haven't changed for more than 51 million years. They're called "living fossils" and are the sole living link between the lower and higher plants, between ferns and conifers. Ginkgos are a symbol of longevity and are considered one of the wonders of this world. They were once thought extinct but were discovered in China again in the 1700s.

Ginkgos were native to Washington becoming extinct around 50 million years ago. The Ginkgo survived in China and has been cultivated and planted all over the world. William Hamilton brought the Ginkgo to Philadelphia in 1784. Three thousand year old Ginkgos are found in Chinese monastery gardens. Four Ginkgo survived the Hiroshima blast in 1946 and are still healthy today. Kew Gardens in England has a three hundred year old Ginkgo and a tree more than 100 years old is in Issaquah Washington. The Ginkgo Petrified Forest State Park near Vantage Washington gives glimpses back into the prehistoric times of the Ginkgo.

Ginkgo is a dioecious gymnosperm meaning the male and female are separate trees. It takes at least twenty-five years for the seeds to appear. Catkin-like pollen cones appear on the male and the female tree has ovules in pairs on stalks each containing an egg cell looking green, turning greenish-yellow followed by orange and brown. For photos of these structures visit <http://www.xs4all.nl/~kwanten/thetree.htm>. This site was the most complete resource on the Internet I could find on the Ginkgo. If you cannot access this site from home, visit your local library.

It's recommended you purchase a male Ginkgo. The female fruits are quite odiferous and have been described as "rancid butter" or "vomit." The orange fruit drops to the ground where it produces a slimy substance covering the ground where pollen from the male tree drops to the ground and swims sperm-like to fertilize the fruit. Most Ginkgo we buy for our gardens have been propagated from cuttings or grafted. You'll want to make sure the Ginkgo you choose is a male.

Ginkgos are a great tree for nearly every situation. They're planted as street trees in cities because they have the ability to survive pests, drought, storms, ice, poor soil and they absorb pollution. When young their growth is columnar. The leathery ribbed leaves are appealing shades of green turning to gold and yellow in autumn. Leaves usually fall around Halloween. The leaves

fall rapidly, sometimes in one or two hours the tree will become bare. Leaves have a deep vertical slit dividing the leaf into two lobes. Sometimes the lobes split again, always in pairs. The trees can survive in climates ranging from Iceland to Australia.

The bark is interesting too. Colors range from light brown to brownish-gray. Textural interest comes from the furrowed, ridging which increases with age. The trunks are vertical giving the tree a stately appearance. The trees can grow seventy to eighty feet tall but usually only grow thirty-five to fifty feet. The average growth rate is one to three feet per year; it's a very well-behaved slow growing tree.

Ginkgos prefer full to partial sun and moist, deep, well-drained soils but are so adaptable they'll also grow in poor soils, compacted soils, various soil pHs; survive heat, drought, salt spray and air pollution. Ginkgos are very resistant to insect pests and to fungal, viral and bacterial diseases as well as to ozone and sulfur dioxide pollution, fire and even radiation.

The longevity, durability, tenacity and substance of the Ginkgo can inspire us. If you don't have room in your garden for a Ginkgo please visit the Ginkgos at Nelson Park and Raab Park in Poulsbo. Many of our local nurseries carry Ginkgos. Maybe you even have one or two in your own neighborhood.

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