

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 7-14-04) Cedar Underplantings, ©2005

Hello Gardeners. This week's question requests plants to put under Cedars. The writer says, "What can I plant other than ferns." My first answer is, of course, *Polystichum munitum*. Dang that's a sword fern. Sorry reader.

In my own garden Vinca, Hydrangea, azaleas and *Crococsmia* grow quite contentedly and healthily near and under our grouping of *Thuja plicata* (Western Red Cedar). The book "Right Plant Right Place" by Nicola Ferguson (Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0671523961) lists additional plants for dry shade: *Ribes sanguineum*, *Liriope muscari*, *Dryopteris filix-mas* (which is a fern), *Epimedium*, *Polypodium* (also a fern), *Cyclamen*, *Euphorbia* and *Lamium*. Gardeners on the Internet report having success with ferns (here we go again), Wild Ginger, *Trillium*, *Dicentra*, *Hepatica*, *Scilla* and Solomon's Seal. There are also varieties of hardy orchids and rhodies for cohabiting with Cedar. Visit your favorite local nursery to see what varieties they recommend.

Some plants and trees use allelopathy to inhibit the growth of other plants in their root zone. Black Walnut trees are a classic example. It was once thought that allelopaths were the reason gardeners had difficulty getting plants to grow in the root zone of Western Red Cedar. Dr. Linda Chalker-Scott, Horticulturist for Washington State University Extension, Puyallup, states studies prove *Thuja* (Cedar) does not excrete allelopaths.

A more accurate explanation for difficulty in growing plants under Cedars is the dense dry shade caused by the j-shaped, ground-sweeping branches of the trees. Cedars often prefer moist soils but will also survive in dry and sunny conditions. Once you've decided to plant under or around your Cedar trees you'll want to water your chosen plantings on a regular basis for their first growing season. The hydrangea I chose gets regular watering (once a week) during the months of July through September. I monitor the soil and watch the plant for signs of drought stress. It's now in its third year, thriving and blooming profusely.

Western Cedar has played a significant role in the lives of our Native People. Some uses were: canoes, tools, clothing and fuel made from naturally-fallen trees. In addition to other uses bark provided materials for baskets and clothing. In "Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast" Pojar and MacKinnon write, "The power of the redcedar tree was said to be so strong a person could receive strength by standing with his or her back to the tree....A Coast Salish myth says the Great Spirit created redcedar in honor of a man who was always helping others: 'When he dies and where he is buried, a cedar tree will grow and be useful to the people.' (Stewart 1984.27)."

If you've tried planting nearly everything under your cedars and failed, give yourself permission to completely enjoy your amazing *Thuja plicata* for its stately and noble beauty as a solitary marker in your garden. Remember too, you'll never have to worry about weeds under your cedars.

While we're on the subject of trees I received an interesting catalogue in the mail this week. It's the 2003 (yes that's correct) Spring Catalog of "American Forests Historic Tree Nursery." I know it didn't take our postal service a year and a half to deliver this catalogue. I visited the website at www.historictrees.org and found 2004 information so I know everything in the catalogue is still current. American Forests was founded in 1875. It's the nation's oldest nonprofit conservation organization according to the website. Part of their mission is searching out trees of historic significance particularly trees planted by presidents, authors and other famous persons in America's past. Offerings include: Pearl S. Buck Crabapple, Amelia Earhart Sugar Maple, Clara Barton Kousa Dogwood, Gettysburg Address Honeylocust, Lewis and Clark Cottonwood and Martin Luther King Jr. Sycamore.

Trees range in price from thirty dollars up to three hundred. However the average cost is closer to forty dollars per tree. Each arrives as a kit with a one to three-foot tall tree, a growing tube, stake for support, step-by-step instructions, fertilizer tablet, bird safety net and personalized "Certificate of Authenticity" with the history of the tree and a "Lifetime Replacement Guarantee." Shipping is eleven dollars. A complimentary one-year "American Forests" (four issues) magazine subscription (\$25 value) is included in the cost of each tree.

American Forests encourages gardeners to nominate trees for the National Register of Historic Trees. You can nominate online at www.historictrees.org or call for a form (800-320-8733). The "National Register of Historic Trees" is scheduled for publication in 2005. The goal is to identify, preserve and protect trees of historic significance in every state, community and town.