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Nut Trees on Campus

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Nut Trees on Campus by Bill Meyer, WSU Senior Groundskeeper (Retired)

WSU Retiree Center Newsletter Spring 2019

Buck: What did the nut say when it sneezed?
Hazel: I have no clue.
Buck: Cashew!

While the WSU Landscape Arboretum has no cashew trees (the cashew tree is a tropical evergreen), a number of nut trees can be found scattered throughout the campus. Hickories, Ohio buckeyes and Horsechestnuts, Black Walnuts and Butternuts and many different types of Oaks are the most notable of the nut trees that grow here. Let's take a journey through the campus and take a closer look at some of these nut producing trees.

The native Shagbark Hickory is the most common of all the hickories and can be identified by its distinctive shaggy bark. This tall, straight tree can grow up to 100 feet in height. It is valued for its tasty, edible nuts having an excellent flavor. The American Indian and early colonists would gather the nuts, cure them, and often create a nutmeal from the shell. Unfortunately, WSU lost its fairly mature Shagbark Hickory just as it was about to produce nuts due to expansion of Kryzsko Commons. A new, young Shagbark Hickory has been planted near Phelps Hall replacing it.



The other native Hickory tree found on our campus is the Bitternut Hickory. Two of these trees are growing in the front yard of our very own Retiree Center. These tall, slender trees can be identified by their bright yellow buds. While the Shagbark Hickory nut is fairly tasty, the Bitternut Hickory nut is aptly named due to its rather bitter taste.

Both the 'Ruby Red' and 'Fort McNair' Horsechestnuts that are found on the WSU campus are best known for their extremely large, showy pinkish - red flowers. In addition to their flowers, the two Horsechestnuts sometimes produce a nut that should be avoided since they are said to be toxic and unsafe to eat.

When we give tree tours of the Landscape Arboretum, we often stop to look at the 'Fort McNair' Horsechestnut and the Ohio Buckeye that are found between Somsen Hall and Maxwell Hall. Here, a visitor can see the minor differences between the two trees. The flower on the Ohio Buckeye is yellowish-white and its nut is enclosed in a spiny, golden husk that is bitter tasting and can be poisonous. (Boiling or roasting the nut is supposed to remove the toxins.) Squirrels appear not to read any of the information that indicates the buckeye nut is toxic and are said to be the only animal able to consume the nut.

Finally, rounding out our nutty tour of the WSU campus trees is the Black Walnut. Two of these can be found just south of the large native garden next to the Integrated Wellness Complex. Some of you may remember these trees that drop their nuts on nearby sidewalks, cars or even worse, on an unsuspecting bystander! The large nuts still pelt the ground in the fall making walking in the area an adventure. Underneath the extremely hard shell is a delicious walnut that can be worth the effort to open.

If you are interested in finding out more information on the Nut trees found throughout our Landscape Arboretum, we will be hosting a tree tour of the Fruit and Nut trees on Saturday, July 6th at 9:00 -10:30 a.m. as part of the Great River Shakespeare Festival.

In a nutshell that completes our brief look at WSU's nut trees. I hope you enjoyed the tour. --Bill



Shagbark Hickory Tree



Horsechestnut Tree



Foliage and fruits of the Black Walnut Tree