

## YARD & GARDEN NEWSLETTER- JUNE 2016

### Catalpa Time Again!

Diane DeWitte, UM Extension Educator

#### IT'S IN MY PAST

I have to confess, I was in love with catalpa trees before I was a Minnesotan. I grew up on a farm around the mile of Ethel & Walter; spent my youth traveling up and down their driveway under a huge tree with large heart-shaped leaves. I knew that the tree had odd pods sometimes, and I recognized that it was very different from the usual maples and oaks we had everywhere.

Even the name was exotic: ca-Tal-pa. Folks in my family referenced the tree as from South, and not native for my hometown of Wabash, Indiana.

#### IT'S IN MY PRESENT

I came to Minnesota in the dead of winter, so as they snow melted I was excited to see what greened up in my new world. Imagine my surprise when I realized that the huge (old) rough-looking tree on the west lawn of Mankato's Historic Courthouse was a catalpa. I couldn't believe it lived in this climate, and was astounded that it flourished, producing hundreds of white blossoms in June.

As time has passed, I've noticed specific individual catalpa trees in my world, and this summer I began to gather more information about them.



Showy white fragrant flowers, 2-3 inches long in clusters 5-8 inches wide appear on the first day of summer.

#### THEY'RE SPECIAL

The Northern Catalpa (*Catalpa speciosa*) got its name from the Cherokee word for "tree". 'Speciosa' means "showy" because of its large proliferation of white flowers. It is also called Catawba, Indian Bean tree, or Indian Cigar.

Catalpa leaves are distinctive large and heart-shaped while its flowers are prolific, white, showy and orchid-like. The fruit is an 18-24 inch seed pod which ripens in the fall, splits open, and releases.

The stately old catalpa tree at the Blue Earth County Historic Courthouse still blooms heartily every year winged seeds. Seed pods may remain in the tree well into the next season, just hanging there, split and empty.

## THEY'RE EVERYWHERE

The Northern Catalpa flourishes in Zones 4-8 which means you will find them anywhere from Minneapolis to San Antonio. There's also a Southern Catalpa—it is smaller and less showy than its northern relative. The catalpa is part of the Trumpet-creeper (Bignoniaceae) family, which includes several different types of small-growing specimen-type trumpet trees found in Zones 10-11. Their similarities to the catalpa? They all have seed pods.

## NOT EVERYONE LOVES THEM

In some parts of the country, the catalpa is considered a nuisance or even an invasive species. Homeowners often have no good to say about them, complaining of the 'trash' they produce: Numerous large leaves and spent flower blooms to rake up, and the ubiquitous seed pods littering the ground. Catalpas can sprout from a cut stump or nearby tree roots, but the best way they proliferate is the spread of their seed by wind, squirrels and birds.

## HAVE YOU NOTICED THEM IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD?

In my travels through Le Center recently, I noticed a pair of young(ish) catalpas flanking a homeowner's driveway. I asked about taking photos and learned that the trees had been transplanted there more than 40 years earlier after they sprouted as volunteers on the edge of the homeowner's uncle's garden. As they've matured, they have produced the nuisance seedpods, but the homeowner and her family enjoy their shade and flowers tremendously.

Naturalist and Minnesota author Stan Tekiela notes that even though the catalpa is non-native, it "has been successfully planted along streets and boulevards in just about every city in the southern two-thirds of Minnesota".

My research this summer has substantiated those observations, and I've learned to spot the grand ladies in all of my favorite hunts.

## A FEW PESTS

While catalpa trees are hardy against many diseases and pests, there is one common insect found in the tree. The larvae of the Catalpa Sphinx moth is commonly known as the Catalpa worm, and is highly prized as fishing bait. Even when defoliated by the worm, the catalpa will readily grow new leaves. Very rarely will this defoliation cause the tree to die.

## CATALPA IN YOUR FUTURE?

One person's spectacular specimen is another's despised weed, but here are some points to consider when you're looking for a different tree to plant.

- Adapts to all kinds of soils and environment, including dry or compacted soils
- Grows to heights of 40-60 feet with a 50 foot canopy spread
- Fast growing, tremendous source of shade
- Highly drought tolerant
- Can be successful urbanized
- Works well as a specimen tree
- Thrives in full sun to partial shade
- Large leaves and seed pods add "trash" to the lawn
- Has lifespan of 60-90 years
- Very few pests affect it



The stately old catalpa tree at Blue Earth County Historic Courthouse still blooms heartily every year.

# Extension Corner

## Ants in Home Lawns

### Gregory Hoover, Penn State Extension Entomologist

Several species of ants commonly inhabit home lawns and ornamental plantings of trees and shrubs. Winged ants are frequently confused with swarming termites. Ants can be easily distinguished from termites by the following characteristics: (1) ants have elbowed antennae while those of termites are straight and beadlike; (2) front wings of ants are larger in size than the rear wings while those of termites are all equal in size; (3) the waist of ants are thin and appear to be constricted while those of termites are broad and not constricted; (4) wings of ants are usually transparent or brownish while those of termites are milky-white.

### DESCRIPTION

Little Black Ant: Workers of this species are 1/10-1/8 inch in length with soft jet-black bodies. These ants are found primarily in soil and rotting wood. They feed on a wide variety of food sources.

The Pavement Ant: These ants are slow, sluggish, short-legged, and usually nest under pavements and foundations. They are 1/12-1/4 inch in length and brownish-black. They feed on a wide variety of food sources (seeds, grease, animal food).

Cornfield Ant: These ants are usually found nesting in open places in the soil or in rotten wood. They are 1/8-1/4 inch in length, robust, soft-bodied, and light to dark brown. The body, when crushed, has an acid (formic) odor. These ants are found feeding on seeds, and often are associated with aphids and mealybugs which are excreting honeydew.

Larger Yellow Ant: These ants are 1/10-1/8 inch in length and yellow. When crushed they give off a characteristic lemon-verbena odor. They are common soil inhabiting species which tend mealybugs and aphids on the roots of plants.

### LIFE HISTORY

Ants form colonies or nests where queens remain. Most ant species have only one queen per nest; she lays the eggs needed to maintain or increase the colony. Queens may live from 1-15 years and produce many thousands of eggs.

Larvae, or maggot-like grubs, hatch from the eggs. They are transparent white, soft-bodied, and legless. These larvae, along with the queen, are fed by the worker ants (foragers). Larvae pass through several molts before pupation and adulthood are reached. The majority of these develop into workers; a few develop into winged males and females which are the kings and queens of the ant colony. At certain times during the year (usually early spring and late summer), varying with the species, these winged ants leave the nest and swarm. Females and males mate and the males die soon after. The mated female (queen) flies to an attractive nesting site, tears off her wings, and encloses herself in a small excavation in the soil, and lays eggs. She feeds and cares for the first generation of progeny until they are mature adults. After that they and succeeding generations care for her. She remains in the nest and continues to produce eggs the remainder of her life.

### DAMAGE

Ants seldom cause serious damage to home lawns. They may cause minor damage to the turf by loosening the soil and constructing small mounds in the nesting areas. Many ants are considered beneficial because they are scavengers and predators on certain harmful insects.

### CONTROL-HOME LAWN CONTROL ONLY

The secret of success in controlling an ant infestation is to locate and destroy the nest, including the queen and her young. Attempt to trace the ants' line of march from the food source to the approximate nest location. There are several registered insecticides that can be applied on home lawns. Careful spot treatments of ant hills with a registered control material will help reduce ant populations. Follow label directions carefully for each treatment.

# Master Gardener Opportunities Available:

## SUMMER GARDEN HELP AT THE CHILDREN'S SCIENCE MUSEUM IN MANKATO

Summer Adopt-A-Garden at the Children's Museum of Southern MN.

Rochelle Koberoski at the Children's Science Museum, 224 Lamm Street, Mankato, is looking for some Master Gardener expertise at their outdoor "farm" this summer. They will be planting and growing vegetables in three 4x4 raised beds. They need someone to help plant & maintain a garden, and to teach a one- hour composting lesson at one of their education days this summer.

If you are interested in being involved, please contact Rochelle at [507-344-9107](tel:507-344-9107) or email at [Rochelle.koberoski@cmsouthernmn.org](mailto:Rochelle.koberoski@cmsouthernmn.org)

## ASSISTANCE AT THE VINE LANDSCAPING

Our friend Darlene Shorn and another Master Gardener have been caring for the VINE Community Center landscaping since it was planted three years ago.

There is an opportunity to help with this effort this summer. The landscape is planted with perennials and other repeat performers, so the task is as simple as keeping things clean and checking it regularly. If you would like to help, please contact the Extension Office at 507-304-4326 or Darlene.

## GRAFTING AND TOP WORKING COURSE AT HOCH ORCHARD

This Course gives the rare opportunity to see top-worked trees of different ages and stages of growth. Not only will participants learn basic bench grafting techniques with different grafting tools, they will also learn how to top-work old trees to new modern varieties.

Saturday May 7th, 9:00 to 3:00 at Hoch Orchard near La Crescent Minnesota

\$50 per orchard or family with one set of handouts and one lunch

\$25 for a student or student group with one set of handouts and one lunch

\$15 for extra lunch and break snacks. This is a local lunch made with products from the farm that includes a tasting of our wine and cider. No deli box lunches here!

Jake Overgaard, our Winona County Extension Educator, will give some background and history of grafting.

Harry Hoch and the orchard staff will help with grafting and tours.

Following is a link with additional information and registration details: <http://z.umn.edu/15k6>