Fall 2009
Newsletter for the
Clients and Friends of
Hartney Greymont
Tree and Lawn Specialists
An Employee Owned
Company

leaflet

hartney greymont

The Reforestation of New England

Between global warming and introduced insect infestations, environmental news too often tends toward the negative. So here's some good news. Thousands of square miles' worth.

Slowly but steadily, New England has essentially renewed its forests. It may seem hard to believe, but, after becoming 75-80% deforested between the 17th and 19th centuries, the trees are back. Farming was just too difficult here and was basically abandoned by the time of the Civil War. (Note: a fencing census ca. 1870 estimated that there were at least 240,000 miles of stone walls in New England and upstate New York—many are still visible as you walk through the woods.)

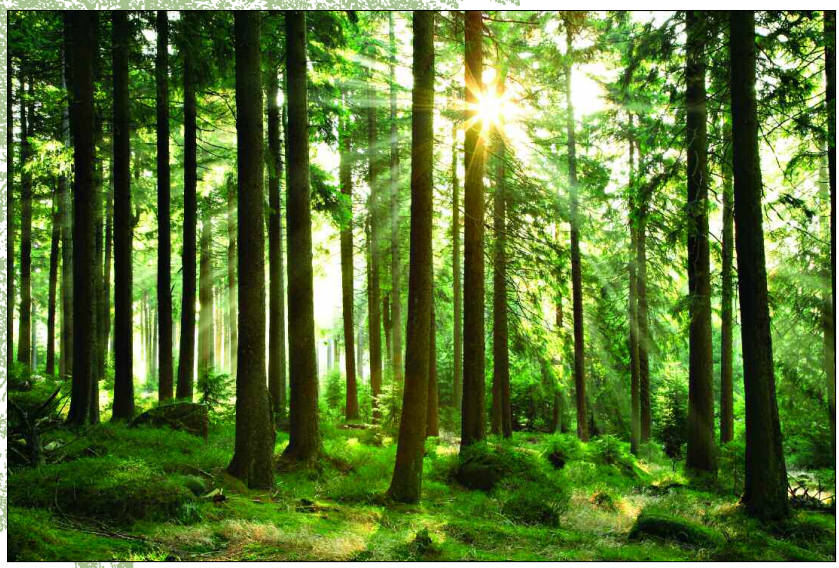
Professional arborists and *leaflet* readers can learn a lot about how nature reclaims unused land by studying our new forests. The first move is made by pioneer species, mainly poplar, birch and ash. These are opportunistic plants that spring up fast in open fields and grow quickly without any defensive strategy. Next, in a process called succession, the pioneers give way to white pine. White pines, however, do not grow well in the shade of other white pines, so they are followed by hardwoods that flourish in the pines' understory and eventually overtake them.

Understanding succession or "reading the landscape" is extremely useful to our arborists. For one thing, it allows us to advise clients on which trees to keep and which trees to cut. In the end, the hardwoods always win.

If you would like to learn more about New England's reforestation, visit the Harvard Forest research center in Petersham, Massachusetts. The forest covers about 3,000 acres and has miles of self-guided trails. It's a wonderful chance to see a pristine forest from the inside out. According to the ecologists there, all major species of trees are returning. In fact, they estimate that in another 300 years or so, the truly giant specimens that the Pilgrims found, e.g., sycamores 20 feet across, white pines 250 feet high, will be commonplace once again.

And while you're there, be sure to stop by the Fisher Museum and see the 23 dioramas. Created in the 1920s and 1930s, they illustrate the history, ecology and conservation of New England's forests and are worth a trip to Petersham in their own right.

In the final analysis, it's reassuring to know that Nature is resilient and, given half a chance, more than capable of repairing the damage we do.



Climbing Trees

All arborists climb trees but some are better than others. Hartney Greymont's Marcy Gladdys, for example, just won first place in the North American Women's division of this year's International Tree Climbing Competition.

> "...we're practicing urban forestry. Climbing is part of it, but so is botany and soil chemistry."

Contestants were called on to display extraordinary levels of competence in everyday working skills, as well as to orchestrate an aerial rescue. As the *Wall Street Journal* observed about last year's competition: "What these arborists do — here and at work — is more akin to Class 5 rock-climbing than to shimmying up Mrs. Smith's old oak tree." Indeed, rock climbing is how Marcy started out.

If you ever see her in one of your trees, she may be doing structural pruning to minimize the danger of ice damage or what arborists call "hazard pruning". Anyone who has found a 400 lb. tree limb on the hood of his car understands the value of hazard pruning.

"I also do a lot of ornamental pruning," says Marcy, "to maintain the tree's shape and scale. Essentially, we're practicing urban forestry. Climbing is part of it, but so is botany and soil chemistry."

She studied these subjects at the Stockbridge School at UMASS in Amherst. Her first arborist's job didn't work out, however. "I had very strong feelings about how we should approach trees and the environment and that company didn't seem to get it." Someone at HG suggested that she interview with us and she's been here ever since. "I particularly like Hartney's emphasis on safety and professional training," she says. "They know what's important."

Asked if she would recommend tree climbing to amateurs, she answers: "Absolutely. I think recreational climbing is useful in getting people to really see and appreciate the trees around them. You take care of the things you appreciate."

On the subject of recreation, Marcy recently returned from a trip to the Pacific Northwest where she climbed a 300 ft. Douglas fir, among other giants. With a group of friends, she also overnighted in a stand of hemlocks. They used treeboats, which are like hammocks only a lot more stable. "We were only about 50 feet up," Marcy admits.

Looking ahead, she would like to climb in European forests and study with the arborists there. "When it comes to tree care, Europeans are progressive and traditional at the same time. We have a lot to learn from them."

An Inconvenient Truth

Which of the following statements are true? A. We've had exceptional amounts of rain this year. B. Bountiful moisture increases the growth of trees and shrubs. C. Excess growth makes trees more vulnerable to damage. D. Shrubs can outgrow their space in the landscape and become unattractive. E. Many of us want to minimize expenses right now.

Obviously, all are true. The question is: can they be reconciled? Here are a few suggestions.

1. Talk with your arborist about what we call the Smart Minimum, summer pruning aimed at protecting your trees and plants against damage.

2. Defer pruning for a season on plants which have a sound structure or are in less prominent locations.

3. Ask us to contain the long ends and prune out deadwood rather than fine-prune. This will save time and money.

4. Let one of our arborists show you the basics of natural hand pruning so that you can prune some plants yourself.

5. Whatever you do, avoid the temptation to shear shrubs that have been naturally pruned. This will destroy the beauty and health of your plants.

These are only guidelines. If you have specific questions about how to manage your trees and shrubs, please give us a call at 781-444-1227. We'd be glad to talk with you.

The Asian Longhorned Beetle

We have seldom used *leaflet* as a platform for editorial opinions, but the threat the ALB represents to the hardwood trees of New England prompts us to reach out to you.

The Asian Longhorned Beetle has already infested the Worcester area. It has no enemies, an abundant food supply and, lately, human supporters. The only way to deal with the ALB is to remove and destroy infected trees. Some property owners, however, are resisting the eradication effort. Given the insects' potential to devastate our forests and landscapes, this is a dangerously irresponsible attitude.

Ironically, Worcester itself created the conditions that have led to the ALB's proliferation there. In 1953, a tornado flattened thousands of trees. The subsequent replanting was massive in scale but much too narrow in scope. In fact, almost all the trees planted were varieties of maple. Establishing monocultures is never a good idea, but was particularly unfortunate in this case. The ALB colonizes maples first.

As always, misinformation is common, but the facts are plain and there are several ominous precedents to consider.

First, we've seen this kind of threat before in different forms. In the early 20th century, American chestnuts were a prominent part of the landscape, a primary timber and shade tree. Then the Chestnut Blight arrived and they all but vanished in a few decades.

They were replaced with elm trees, another beautiful species and another monoculture. In the 1930s, these elms began to succumb to Dutch Elm disease, an exotic pathogen that, like the ALB, was introduced accidentally. Once again, the face of New England was permanently altered.

But we never learn. The elms were replaced by a third monoculture, Norway maples. And so we've set the stage for another catastrophic die-off.

This is why we feel so strongly that the ALB must be contained and eradicated before it can spread widely throughout the Northeast. From a financial perspective alone, we have better uses for the billions of dollars it would cost to remove tens of thousands of dead trees—not to mention repairing the damage caused by falling branches.

Let's break the monoculture-destruction cycle. Education is the crucial first step. We've got to make more people understand that an *ecological disaster is inevitable* if we fail to act decisively now.

A Short Course in Responsible Fertilizing: Part I

(Based on client questions)

Q. What's the best way to fertilize my lawn?

A. We recommend compost, the ultimate slow-release nitrogen source. Spread the compost, aerate the lawn and you're set. Composting is purely organic and highly effective. But that's just one option. Remember, there is no "correct" way to fertilize. At Hartney Greymont, we use a variety of approaches based on what you want and your lawn needs.

Q. What is no-phosphorous fertilizer?

A. Contrary to traditional opinion, lawns don't need much if any extra phosphorous. Which is good to know because phosphorous can cause algae production—and that can lead to the clogging of nearby streams. Of course, phosphorous in small amounts is vital to the growth of healthy turf roots, so speak to a specialist before altering your program.

Q. What is slow-release nitrogen fertilizer?

A. Nitrogen is what helps grass stay green and healthy. Slow release nitrogen comes in many forms, is either synthetic or organic, and mimics nature's way of feeding lawns. Applying the right amount of balanced nutrients at the right time of year is key. There are several trade-offs. For example, a strong dose of nitrogen-rich fertilizer can make a dull lawn turn green fast. But in hot weather it can also stimulate growth that leads to browning out, thatch buildup and over-mowing. There are now fertilizers available that use different means to extend the period over which nitrogen is released.

Q. Any other advice?

A. Whether you plan to do it yourself or call in professionals, fall is one of the best times to act here in New England. Cooler weather is slowing growth rates. Sugar is moving from blades to roots. Fertilizing now helps promote root development and the storage of carbohydrates, giving your lawn a needed boost in the spring. Nitrogen that goes into the soil in the fall will stay in place throughout the winter and be available to your lawn in the spring.

As always, we welcome your questions and would be glad to come out for a chat.

The New Bio-Diesels Are in.

Hartney Greymont recently joined organizations ranging from L.L. Bean and NASA to Yellowstone National Park and the City of San Francisco when we added eight bio-diesel cars to our fleet.

As you can see, the Volkswagen Jettas are wearing full Hartney Greymont regalia, so it should be easy to recognize them if you encounter any on the road.

Like thousands of other enterprises throughout America, we're trying to reduce our carbon footprint and save money on fuel. The new cars average about 50 miles per gallon on the highway. Ecologists and accountants will agree that's a beautiful start.

Please feel free to ask for a complimentary ride if an HG bio-diesel vehicle happens to call on you. We want to do all we can to spread the green gospel.

By the way, if you would like to research bio-diesel yourself, you'll find a great deal of easily accessible information at www.biodiesel.org/resources/fuelfactsheets/

Experience our Guarantee

If you are not satisfied with any treatment or completed job, let us know. We will resolve the situation to your satisfaction, no questions asked. Our goal is not only to make sure your trees, shrubs, and lawn are as healthy as possible, but also to provide you with the peace of mind a satisfaction guarantee can bring.

Calendar of Care

	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Review trees with arborist for dormant care	■	■	■	■
Plant Health Care visits & treatments	■	■		
Apply antidessicants to evergreen foliage			■	■
Subsurface fertilize ornamental & shade trees	■	■	■	■
Naturally prune ornamental trees & shrubs	■	■	■	■
Structurally prune & remove shade trees		■	■	■
Transplant & plant trees & shrubs	■	■	■	
Compost topdress, aerate & overseed lawns	■	■		
Plan landscape design	■	■	■	■

Hartney Greymont, Inc.
433 Chestnut Street
Needham, MA 02492
781.444.1227
www.hartney.com
trees@hartney.com
Concord Needham

Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce
2008 Small Business of the Year

ACCREDITED TREE CARE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION ETHICS QUALITY CONFIDENCE