

TWO UNUSUAL TREES AT SUNSET MEMORIAL PARK

By Wayne Jewell

At the South East corner of section 2J, located about 25 feet North of the flower bed is a rather unusual tree. I call this tree unusual because it is actually native to China and Japan. Also, it is the only one of its kind in the entire park.

The common name for this tree “Katsura Tree” and its botanical name is *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*. Try saying that ten times fast. This is considered to be a “medium” size tree grows from 40 to 60 feet tall and anywhere from 25 to 60 feet wide. It is a tree that is tolerant of clay soil and normally requires very little maintenance. However, when it is subjected to afternoon sun and hot, dry winds, it may require supplemental watering or its leaves may scorch.

The flowers on this tree are tiny and insignificant. Since this tree is “dioecious” (male and female flowers form on separate trees) flower color can be helpful in determining the sex of the tree. Male trees have red flowers while female trees have green flowers and form tiny seed pods at flowering time. Now if you ask me which sex our tree is, I have to admit that I don't know because I have never paid attention to the flower color. One thing that I have noticed about this tree is that around flower time in April, it tends to give off a fragrant aroma that reminds me of cookies baking in the oven.

Another interesting tree species located on section 2-O at the intersection of sections 2J, 2C and 2 O is a “Japanese Zelkova” known botanically as *Zelkova serrate*. As the name would suggest, it is native to Japan. It can also be found in Eastern China, Korea and Taiwan. This tree is another “medium” size, deciduous tree that grows from 60 to 80 feet tall but has been known to reach heights of up to 100 feet. It is considered to be a ‘broadly rounded” tree that has dark green leaves from Spring through Summer that turn to shades of both orange and yellow in Autumn.

The bark is to me, what makes this tree most unusual. It is spotted with shades of gray, olive green, orange and tan in a scaly pattern. I have also noticed while pruning some branches that the wood is rather difficult to cut and takes some time with a pruning saw.

In Japan, these trees are often used for making “Bonsai” trees as they adapt well to the constant branch and root pruning techniques used to grown what should be a big tree in a small container. There is a Zelkova near Osaka, Japan that is estimated to be over 1,000 years old. Now this tree is hardly a “bonsai”. In fact, it has the 2nd largest trunk circumference known, in the world of any tree of this species. It is 11.95 meters (approximately 39 feet) around at its base. This measurement is normally made at about 4 feet off the ground.

Because of its attractive shape, low maintenance and easy fall leaf clean up, this tree is being used more and more in this country as a lawn or park tree.