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These specimens may be messy, short-lived, or prone to disease, but they also find a soft spot in the hearts of many Dallasites.

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Dallas twentysomethings flocked to The Village in the '70s, and now the hip crowd is back. **By Mary Malouf**

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THIS PAGE: A beautiful Bois d'arc specimen. Photography by DAVE SHAFER

trash trees

Inconvenient. Messy. Disease prone. These trees are blacklisted by experts and disappearing from the Dallas landscape. But for many of us, they inspire passionate discourse.

Photography by DAVE SHAFER





MIMOSA *By* Rebecca Sherman

We had two idyllic mimosa specimens in our front yard. When I was in elementary school during the 1960s, they must have been at their peak of beauty. One grew in the center of our front patio, surrounded by a fence. In the evenings before dusk, my twin sister and I would sit on a carpet of ivy beneath the tree's perfect umbrella-shaped canopy and look for fairies among the fallen blooms. Our mother told us about the fairies when we first moved into the house when we were 6; fairies liked to wear the mimosa's silky pink pompoms as skirts and dance around, unseen. If we were quiet, we might hear them. Of course the tree was magical enough, and its blooms perfumed enough, to attract more than bees.

At night, a mimosa's fern-like leaves close up for sleep. During the day, when it was hot and boring, we made them fold up instantly by running a finger down the center of a leaf. Mimosas grow long seed pods that reminded me of green beans, and we used to pick bowls full, snapping them open and pretending to cook them for dinner.

I only found out recently that other people hate the parts of mimosas that I love. An online agricultural extension service puts it thusly: "The

litter problem of the blooms, the leaves, and especially the long seed pods requires consideration when planting this tree...despite its picturesque growth habit and beauty when in bloom, some cities have passed ordinances outlawing further planting of this species." The National Park Service lists it as an exotic weed.

While there is no ordinance in Dallas banning the planting of mimosas, they are on many horticulture experts' do-not-plant lists. They are not for sale at most nurseries, although you can buy them online.

Mimosas grow fast, but they don't live long—only an average of 20 years. Their beauty is fleeting. As they age, their limbs rot and break, and an average summer storm in Dallas can tear them apart. They are susceptible to pests and diseases such as the fatal mimosa wilt.

My mother still lives in the house where our mimosas grew. The front fence leans, but the ivy is lusher than ever. Both mimosas died about 15 years ago, but a 3-foot-tall mimosa sapling has pushed up along the foundation of the house on the west side. In June, its branches were covered in flowers.

BOIS D'ARC *By* Bill Seaman

Ah, the Bois d'arc. How could a tree with such a beautiful French name be such a nuisance? Well, it is those nuisances that got it established in the first place. For early farmers, they were the workhorse of the plant world.

Full of thorns, and thus a natural fence, they would grow without any supplemental water, no hauling buckets of water to nurse them along. The branches made great fence posts (these were pre-Home Depot days, remember) and they were resistant to rot and insects. Ask plumbers who venture into crawl spaces under some of the oldest houses in Dallas and they will tell you the piers those houses rest on are the trunks of Bois d'arc. They'll also tell you that the Bois d'arc looks as new as the day the house was built—it's a carpenter's dream.

There is another aspect of Bois d'arc that people of certain character and community standing are uncomfortable to discuss. If repeated, you must do so quietly and discretely: Bois d'arc trees are sexed. Most people don't know it, but there are male Bois d'arcs and female Bois d'arcs. And you might be interested to know that the City of Dallas Tree Preservation Ordinance protects the male and not the females (horticultural discrimination in its most blatant form). I am surprised that children, if not feminists, have not marched on City Hall to get this changed. With no female Bois d'arcs in the neighborhood, there are no horse apples to lob at each other. What a boring way to spend a summer.





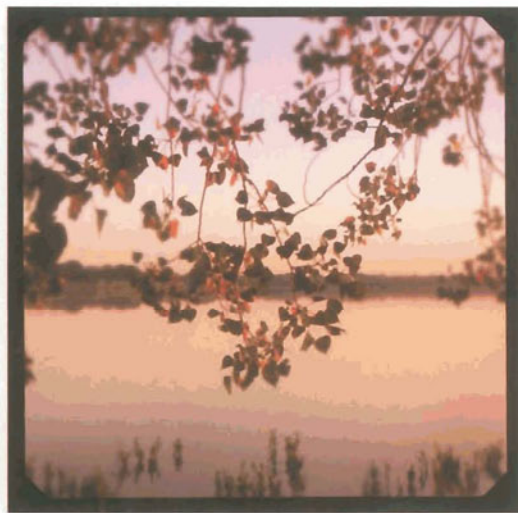




COTTONWOOD *By* Todd Johnson

I had three best friends growing up: Spider-Man, my dog Tippy, and the towering cottonwood in my backyard. Spider-Man never swung by to visit. And Tippy, the temperamental poodle, had a tendency to growl and snap. Come to think of it, perhaps that cottonwood was my true best friend. It certainly was the most dependable of the lot. My cottonwood always enjoyed a quick game of hide-and-go-seek. The mammoth trunk was perfect to hide behind. Nor did the grand poplar mind my scampering through its lofty branches. (Though my worrisome mom certainly did.) Sure, the neighbors complained about the tree's prodigious seeds and its soft, cotton-like tufts of fiber. They clogged up everything. But as a child with no worries, except where I could get my next Kool-Aid fix, each autumn brought a white, downy rain that I danced amid. Most years, it was the closest thing to a snowflake these Texas eyes would see. Now as an adult with a mortgage and my own vents to unclog, I understand what a nuisance the cottonwood can be. Many an online forum is littered with rants from flora fans who hate cottonwoods, their fuzzy seeds, and the havoc they wreak on air conditioners, gardens, and allergies alike. (In Oklahoma, it's illegal to plant a female cottonwood. In Nebraska, it's the much-loved state tree. Ah, irony.) Armed with this newfound knowledge, would I plant the handsome yet hated tree in my own backyard? No. But I still get a little

wistful when I think of my childhood friend with its ashy, wrinkled bark and heart-shaped leaves. Or how a freak bolt of lightening brought the mighty tree to its demise one stormy summer. "Well, I guess that's the end of that," my mom said, thankful to be rid of the cottonwood. And at the time, I thought nothing of it. But hide-and-seek was never quite the same.







THE HACKBERRY *By* Bill Seaman

The hackberry is nature's bandage. It's one of the first trees to establish itself in an earth scar (and these days, there is a lot of scarring going on). This remarkable tree produces berries that are a major food source for songbirds; the birds transport the berries in their tiny stomachs to scarred areas and deposit the hackberry seeds in their droppings. The seeds germinate, the trees grow (without any assistance from you or me, I might add) and go to work producing leaves year after year. Those dropped leaves result in rich compost that in turn sets up a nursery for the next succession of longer-lived, not so messy, trees.

If you enjoy the Katy Trail, you can thank the hackberries for the large red and live oaks, the American elms, cedar elms, pecans, and other trees that create shade, cleaner air, and a home for the birds.

I don't recall ever recommending hackberry trees, but I have two in my yard, planted in the 1960s by a previous owner. They shade my house, cutting my utility bills substantially. My hackberries get the same respect as the red oaks and bur oaks I planted myself. And while I do not care to continue pulling the hackberry seedlings from my flowerbeds, I do not care for houseflies either. While some might consider the hackberries trash trees, they are the hardest working, most beneficial trash I have ever seen.