

WEeping TREES ADD CHARM TO LANDSCAPE

by Ray Rothenberger

There is something soothing about a weeping tree. Perhaps the graceful arching lines give a feeling of peacefulness and charm as pendulous branches sway in the slightest breeze. Whatever the reason, weeping trees have received more attention recently.

Of course, there is nothing new about weeping willow. In many ways weeping willows are the most graceful of all weeping trees. Their limitation, however, is that they need a lot of moisture, have weak wood and are subject to storm damage. Their overall life is fairly short as compared to many other large-growing trees. However, at their prime they are exceptionally beautiful and soothing when reflected in a quiet pond or stream. The most graceful of the weeping willows is the Babylon weeping willow. However, it is less hardy than the frequently planted Wisconsin weeping willow that has pendulous but not truly weeping branches.

Perhaps second on a list of the most wanted weeping trees would be weeping varieties of the higan cherry. Weeping varieties of this cherry are often grafted on an understock about 6 feet tall. If available, the varieties having double flowers produce a longer bloom period than the single-flowered form. A weeping variety that produces flowers in fall and in spring has also been found. However, the fall show is not as spectacular as the spring bloom.

Although there are many varieties of flowering crabapples, the one that appears to be the best with a weeping form is the variety red jade. Flowers have deep pink buds that open to single, white flowers. Fruits are red, small and make an excellent early winter show until birds eat them.

The interest in weeping trees has led to weeping birch, weeping beech, weeping Japanese

pagoda tree and even weeping dogwood. While these trees may not be readily available, and some are not well suited to our climate, they illustrate the interest gardeners have developed in finding and preserving weeping plant forms.

Even evergreens have been selected with weeping forms. One of the most graceful is a weeping variety of the Rocky Mountain juniper called 'Tolleson's weeping juniper.' Although this tree is uncommon, it may be found with bluish foliage as well as with soft green foliage. It is cold-hardy and, where available, makes an interesting small tree to provide landscape accent.

Not all weeping evergreens have the grace of the weeping juniper. Weeping white pine takes many years to develop into a beautiful form. When weeping white pines are young, they lack symmetry, and branches often droop to the ground, forming a mounded appearance. This is also true of the weeping forms of red pine. Pruning, staking and developing a strong central leader are often necessary to train the plant into a suitable tree form as a young plant. This is also true of weeping spruces which, if allowed to go unmanipulated, develop a horizontal growth with branches drooping from a horizontal trunk, forming a large mound.

Some weeping forms of trees can never be expected to become trees. The weeping hemlock develops into a large shrub, which is much broader than it is tall. While most of these weeping plants are relatively rare and often fairly expensive, they do allow gardeners who look for the unusual some choices for unique accent plants.

*Department of Horticulture
University of Missouri
Columbia, Missouri 65211*