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Spring Arrives in the Arboretum

Posted: **March 20, 2014**

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Just when it seems that this long, frigid winter will never end, spring is set to make a grand entrance on campus. One of its earliest appearances will occur near the northeast entrance to Ketchum Hall when the large round buds on the Cornelian Cherry (*Cornus mas*) tree burst open with a flourish of showy yellow blossoms. Growing in small, tight clusters, these blossoms will remain for several weeks. Then Cornelian Cherry will be dressed in deep green leaves, elliptical in shape, with prominent arcuate, or curved, veins.

Cornus mas is a member of the Dogwood family and is native to central and southern Europe and western Asia. William Turner, the sixteenth-century British physician and natural historian, recorded its presence in the British Isles in 1551. Although it is popular in the U.S. as an ornamental shrub or tree, the Cornelian Cherry was originally cultivated for its fruit. When they ripen in late summer, these ruby-hued berries add yet another color to the landscape.

The fruit, which does not fully ripen until it drops from the tree, has been compared in taste to the cranberry or a sour cherry. Humans have discovered multiple uses for the fruit, including herbal medicines, jams, syrup, wine and liqueurs; it is even kept in brine and used like olives. Non-human consumers include bees, birds, rabbits and squirrels. Butterflies find it a suitable larval host and are attracted to its nectar.

The name *Cornus*, meaning "horn," is a reference to the hard wood of the tree. It is extremely dense and does not float in water. Ancient craftsman preferred it for the production of weapons and tools; it is still used for tools and machine parts. The felt used to make the Turkish fez was colored with dye made from the bark, and oil can be extracted from the pits.

The Cornelian Cherry is a slow-growing, relatively small tree, reaching only 15 to 25 feet in height at maturity. But what it lacks in stature is more than made up in the beauty and color it adds to our campus. Be sure to watch for it to blossom in the coming days. This tree was planted in the Maud Gordon Holmes Arboretum as a memorial to Dr. Z. D. Robinson and his wife, Patricia McNaney Robinson.

You can support our beautiful urban campus by making a gift to the Campus Beautification/BSCenery Fund (310509) through the Faculty and Staff Appeal.

Article submitted by *Laura Klenk*, assistant professor, Elementary Education and Reading Department

Photo by *Michael Gallo*, instructional support assistant, Campus Services

Tagged as: Campus Beautification Advisory Committee, Community



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