

**Yard and Garden – December 15, 2012- Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant**

As a young boy growing up in Sutton, Nebraska, I recall spending a good share of my youth playing in the community park. I vividly recollect the enormous trees arching and towering high overhead. As I grew older, I noticed that many of those soaring giants were disappearing. Today, only a few of the original trees remain. Their disappearance was a lesson in the dangers of planting a monoculture — the name given to overplanting one species of tree.

In the 1800s, when most Nebraska communities had their beginnings, early settlers planted trees. Because of its beauty, rapid growth and outstanding tolerance for an assortment of adverse environmental conditions, one particular species of tree was frequently planted. It far outnumbered other genera. That tree was *Ulmus americana* — commonly known as the American elm. Examining old photographs of those cities and towns near the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century reveals many stately American elm trees filling parks and lining streets. Current photos of those same communities divulge a significant difference. The huge trees are gone.

What destroyed those giant trees that once inhabited the park of Sutton, Nebraska, also wiped out most titans in other communities throughout our nation. In the 1930s a deadly fungal disease arrived in the United States. It quickly obliterated the urban forests comprised mostly of American elm trees. The name of this widespread killer was Dutch elm disease (DED).

Interestingly, the Dutch have been unfairly blamed for the millions of trees lost. The disease acquired its name because Dutch scientists first identified it when the disease made its appearance in Holland around 1917. The Dutch elm disease originally came from the Himalayas, traveled to Europe from the Dutch East Indies in the late 1800s, and by the 1930s spread to North America on wooden crates made from infected elm wood. Over the years, new strains of the disease have evolved; thus, DED continues to destroy the remaining American elms. It is said that three to five percent of the remaining American elm trees in the United States die each year. Few are left. I fear soon all will be gone. Sadly, I witnessed the last huge American elm tree growing in Chautauqua Park in Minden, Nebraska, die from DED this past summer.



There is a bright side to this story which offers perhaps a ray of hope. Researchers have been on a quest to find an American elm cultivar, or another similar hybrid species, to take the place of American elm in our landscapes and along our streets. The Society of Municipal Arborists recently announced the 2012 Urban Tree of the Year. This tree is receiving numerous accolades. Ironically, the trade name for this tree is Accolade™.

Accolade™ is a hybrid offspring of two Asian species of elm: the *Ulmus japonica* and *Ulmus wilsoniana*. Its mature habit is upright and arch-like, similar to that of the American elm. Its expected mature height is forty to sixty feet with a spread of thirty-five to forty feet. It is

hardy to Zone 4, and although not entirely immune, it is highly resistant to DED. The original hybrid elm from which Accolade™ is propagated was planted from seed at the Morton Arboretum in Ohio in 1924 where it continues to thrive to this day. This hybrid elm has survived three epidemics of DED over its lifespan which is already 88 years.

Throughout my career with Extension, I have been asked often what tree I would recommend to plant in the home landscape— one that grows quickly and provides excellent shade. If you have asked that same question, perhaps now you will consider planting Accolade™.

Who knows? Someday your grandchildren or great-grandchildren will actively play beneath the arching beauty of giant elm trees once again filling our parks and lining our streets, creating a towering canopy of leafy shade. If so, quite possibly it will be *Ulmus* 'Morton' — Accolade™, the 2012 Urban Tree of the Year.