

## **OUT ON A LIMB**

‘Do I fit in?’

By: Roger Davis, Landscape Architect

Have you ever gone somewhere and from the moment you got there, you felt you were out of place. You were there on time, you were dressed appropriately, every one else seemed to fit in, but for you it just didn't feel right. Plants are like that. They were planted at the right time, looked well in the setting but for them, it just didn't feel right.

Many times we visit the nursery or garden center and see a plant we just have to have. Problem is, we make a purchase, take it home and have no earthly idea where it can be planted. So we just stick it somewhere without considering its cultural requirements. Does it like sun, does it like shade; will it tolerate being wet or does it like dry conditions; does it work in sandy or clay soils? So we introduce it among strangers with whom it has nothing in common and it's not happy. It just doesn't feel right. It's out of place!

A better solution would be to locate a space in the landscape and select the proper plant suited for that space. When we go grocery shopping, we usually have a list of items needed for various meals and we buy just what we need. When we go plant shopping we should have a list of plants for various locations and we buy just what we need. Otherwise the plant will just be stuck where it most likely doesn't belong and sticks out like the proverbial 'sore thumb'.

In this age of environmental correctness, the work 'native plant' has been elevated to a status of nobility. The mere discussion of the subject ranks right up there with religion and politics. Rationality is lost and the 'baby gets thrown out with the bathwater' as diametrically opposed camps emerge where there are those who want to favor natives over exotics. There is a renewed interest in native plant material and that's a good thing as long as they are planted where they belong. You shouldn't move a Mountain Laurel or Piedmont Azalea out of a moist well drained, part shade location and relocate to a poorly drained sunny location. What good did you do in planting a native if you plant it out of habitat? A palmetto is a native tree to Georgia but will not thrive in the Rome or Dalton. A hemlock is a native tree to Georgia but would not be happy in Richmond County, much less Savannah. So what is a native? Native to where? My conditions for a plant to be considered a native are: Originates 35 miles north or south of your property, is within 125 miles east or west, is within 1000' vertical elevation and within the native range of the specie. All four of these must apply to be a native.

Red maples are native to Georgia but what about red maple cultivars 'Red Sunset' or 'October Glory'? They are what I refer to as 'Yankee' maples as they were discovered in Princeton, NJ or some other waste land north of the Mason/Dixon line, accustomed to cooler climates. We are finding that these cultivars are not holding up in our summer heat over the long haul. Sugar Maples are natives but don't seem to do well for us in our area either however there is a cultivar, (Sandersville) named for the area that it was discovered, that is proving to be promising.

Have you lived in different parts of the county and found that you just weren't happy, so you moved? I had client who referred to living in Rochester, New York, as having spent three winters there. They moved! Plants located in wrong places, if they don't die, find themselves being moved and moved and moved. Let's plant the plant in the right place the first time.