

# Out in the Garden

Rockport Garden Club, October 2020



## Garden Shelf:

*The Hidden Life of Trees:  
What they Feel,  
How they Communicate*

By Peter Wohlleben

Years ago, based on something I had written about how ambitious my dog was, my English teacher wrote the following warning: “People are ambitious, dogs are not. Don’t anthropomorphize.” That is; avoid the common habit people have of attributing human characteristics to non-humans and objects.

Well, Peter Wohlleben has done exactly that but with great effectiveness. He ascribes such human concepts

as friendship, love, language, and etiquette to trees. His more than twenty years of experience



as a forest manager in the Eifel Mountains of Germany, built on a lifelong love of nature, have equipped him to understand and describe the complexities of the world of trees. He translates his observations and related scientific information in ways that are not only understandable, but become more meaningful to those of us who live in the world of humans.

Examples of tree “behaviors” abound in this readable, informative and amusing book. To Wohlleben, trees can be seen as social, communicative, protective, and helpful to their neighbors. Trees live in communities, they have mutual support systems.

Forests can be seen as super organisms. Trees have chemically-based defense mechanisms that can respond to onslaughts by insects or animals, repel the attacker and protect themselves and nearby trees from further damage. They communicate with each other both above and below the ground.

They cooperate with fungi for their mutual benefit. The fungi, lacking chlorophyll unable to produce their own food, provide the tree with needed water and from the tree extract sugar. This book abounds with similar observations supported by evidence from scientific research.



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I found certain topics to be of particular interest. For example, I learned that in a natural setting trees tend to be spawned in the shade of their elders. Unlike tree-farm trees, they are deprived of sunlight and tend to grow very slowly, but this slow growth is associated with sturdiness and long life. I will think again before insisting that a young tree must be in full sunlight. Too, Wohlleben’s description of how trees become interconnected and are able to support each other may lead me to group similar trees

rather than choose a single lonesome specimen.



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Finally, about anthropomorphizing, maybe it has its value. Maybe we can be more caring and appreciative of the life in our world if we see more similarities to ourselves than differences.

—Submitted by Lois Muzio

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## The Garden Cart: *Nyssa Sylvatica* 'Zydeco Twist'

*Nyssa sylvatica* is a native North American tree found in mixed woodlands east of the Mississippi, north to Ontario, south to Mexico and as far west as Texas. Its extensive range means it has many common names such as tupelo, black gum, sour gum and pepperidge.

*Nyssa sylvatica* has unrivaled, reliable fall color. In September its glossy, leathery green leaves turn sparkling yellow then progress from apricot, orange, brilliant red, crimson and eventually deep maroon. The spring flowers are not showy but are a good source of nectar. Black gums are primarily dioecious meaning male and a female flowers are borne on separate plants. If you are interested in having heavy blue, black fruit to attract birds you will want a female tree with a male tree within flight distance of the average bee.

Unfortunately, few of us have room in our gardens for a tree that will eventually reach 50 feet tall and 30 feet wide. Instead, plant the much smaller cultivar *Nyssa sylvatica* 'Zydeco Twist' originally grown from a seed found in Louisiana and named after a style of cajun music. It has a central leader with a pyramidal form but the branches kink and twist like Harry Lauder's walking stick. It provides the same fall display but also winter interest.



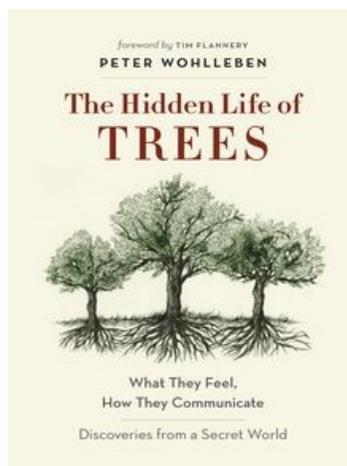
### Attributes of 'Zydeco Twist'

Height: 20 feet  
Spread: 15 feet  
Hardiness Zone: 4 to 9  
Exposure: Part shade to sun  
Soil Moisture: average to wet  
Maintenance: Low  
Growth Rate: Slow to Medium  
Soil Ph: acidic  
Eco-region: Eastern US, Texas  
Tolerates: Salt, Compaction

—Submitted by Patty Hock



## Garden Reminders: What to do in your Garden this Month



Available via:

Amazon

MVLC Library  
System—  
32 copies

Boston Public Li-  
brary Overdrive—  
7 E-Book copies

## Garden Calendar

### Member Meeting

Monday, October 5<sup>th</sup>

12:30 PM-Mingle

1:00 PM-Presentation

Speaker:

Suzanne Mahler

*“Native Plants vs.  
Invasive Species”*

[ZOOM Meeting Link](#)