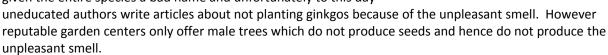
## The Ginkgo Tree

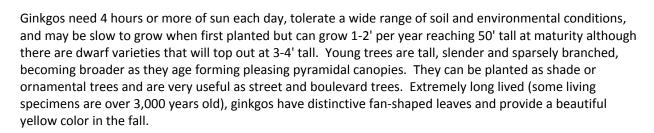
Published 8/19/19 – image of ginkgo branches in the fall from free photos at Needpix.com

Back in June I wrote about the northern catalpa as one of my favorite trees. The ginkgo is another of my top favorites but for several different reasons than the catalpa. Literally there is no other tree like the ginkgo.

The ginkgo is a living fossil, they can be dated back to 270 million years ago to the early Jurassic. The current species, *ginkgo biloba*, and other species in the genus were once widespread throughout the globe but by 2 million years ago were restricted to two small areas in China. Genetic analysis of one of these areas suggests that they were possibly planted and cared for by Chinese monks over the span of 1,000 years. Thought to be extinct in the wild, they were rediscovered in China in 1691 and brought to this continent in the late 1700's.

Ginkgos are dioecious meaning there are separate male and female trees. Only the female trees produce seeds which have very unpleasant smelling coatings sometimes described as rancid butter or human vomit. This has given the entire species a bad name and unfortunately to this day





In the wild ginkgos are typically found in slightly acidic soils but they also grow in alkaline soil and tolerate moderate drought and moist conditions but may suffer during extended hot, dry periods. To say ginkgos are tough is an understatement. In Hiroshima Japan, six ginkgos that were about a mile from the 1945 atomic bomb blast were among the few plants and animals that survived the blast. They were charred but soon regained vigor and are still living today as venerated survivors of that day.

In our area ginkgos are under planted, probably because of the misinformation about their smell and a belief that they are slow growing, which they are not. With their symmetrical growth habit, beautiful fall colors, unique leaf shapes, and ability to withstand extremes these trees are well suited for our environment. There is a ginkgo on the Capital grounds close to the Fighting Stallions Statue; there is another on the east side of Harrison between Broadway and Cabot.

Art Smith is a co-owner of East Pierre Landscape and Garden Center, 5400 SD Hwy 34, Pierre