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The Beauty of Campus Trees in the Fall

By Bill Meyer, WSU Senior Groundskeeper (Retired)

August is here signaling us that summer won't last forever. Even though the temperatures are hot now, the months of autumn are peeking around the corner telling us that cooler and shorter days are soon to come. The leaves on the trees will begin to lose their chlorophyll and reveal their brilliant fall colors. What better time to come to the WSU campus and visit its arboretum than in the fall.

In the past we have discussed the Maples and Ashes. It's hard to beat the reds and oranges of the Maples on campus in the fall. With eight different types of Maples scattered throughout the WSU grounds, there is a Maple to please everyone.

The colorful purple leaves of the 'Autumn Purple' Ash are another favorite. Make sure to check out the 'Autumn Purple' Ashes on the south side of Morey- Shepard.

Let's look at a tree that we haven't talked about yet, the Northern Pin Oak. This Minnesota native tree can be over-looked in the spring, summer, and winter, but not in the fall. After many of the trees on campus have dropped their leaves and the grounds are beginning to look a little barren, the Northern Pin Oak steps to the main stage. During the summer the leaves show signs of yellowing (chlorosis) due to growing in high ph soils, but in the fall the leaves turn a deep red to red brown adding a spectacular beauty to the WSU campus. A group of these Northern Pin Oaks can be found displaying their knockout red colors near the main entrance to Phelps Hall.

Just prior to my retirement a year and half ago, two student workers and I planted a tree called 'Worplesdon' Sweetgum. This unusual tree has glossy green, sharply pointed leaves that turn a brilliant orange and red in the early fall. Sometimes, it even reveals purple colors similar to that of the 'Autumn Purple' Ash. This interesting young tree can be viewed by the east entrance of Kryzsko Commons. Don't miss this one.

Finally, I have noticed that a number of trees have died or have been removed from the campus. This happens each year for a host of reasons, but this year none of them have been replaced. I am alarmed to see the Korean Maple and Korea Fir, the 'Merrill' Magnolia, and a number of trees native to Minnesota not only missing from the grounds but also not replaced this year. In the past trees that were lost were replaced within the year. Several tree funds exist at WSU whose purpose is to replace and add new trees as needed. So retirees, contact WSU administrators and let them know that replacing these important and beautiful trees is important to you.