

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

Branching Out

By Cynthia Brian

"A liquid moon moves gently among the long branches. Thus having prepared their buds against a sure winter, the wise trees stand sleeping in the cold." William Carlos Williams



An old fence gets a colorful make-over with Hardenbergia violaceae, the purple lilac vine



The coral colored twigs of the red branch Japanese maple add sparkle to the blue sky.

I was wrong! Oh, so wrong! And how thrilled I am that I was. One would think that history would be the precedent, but as in stock warnings, past performance is not an indicator of the future. After decades of dismal, dreary, drab Februarys, Mother Nature decided to march on with an early spring in the second month of this new year! Only a few wet weather days tarnished the mostly sunny daylight hours, frosty mornings, and very cold nights. It has been a cheery month, not dreary in the least.

By mid February, my daffodils, crocus, flowering pears and flowering peaches were in full bloom. The birds were singing, the bees were buzzing, and I was dancing in the dirt. Because of the gorgeous weather, much needed hardscape repairs were accomplished chez moi. This year while I was outside benefiting

from the sun's rays, I took the time to really study the beautiful structure of trees in their dormant splendor, something that rarely occurs with inclement weather.

In winter months, unless we are in the Sierras admiring the snow-clad conifers, most of us tend not to take a good look at our leafless trees. We enjoy the beautiful spring flowers and the fabulous fall foliage, without ever paying attention to the bare bark. Although as children we normally color branches with



The mottled trunk of a Japanese maple is beautiful any time of year. Photos Cynthia Brian

a brown crayon, most trees are every color but brown, exhibiting a variety of shades including maroon, gray, yellow, orange, and white. For example, my striking Japanese maple "Sango Kabu" has striking coral red branches that glitter in the sunlight.

The outer bark is the tree's protection from the elements. Tree bark can be smooth, textured, velvety, prickly, patchy, peeling, dull, or bright. On a clear blue-sky day, bark shimmers and shines, and when situated against a backdrop of evergreens, the trunks are a visual treat. Of course, evergreen specimens are of interest as well, such as the heavily textured slivers of redwood.

...continued one page D10