

Horticulture on Vacation

By Larry Caplan, Extension Horticulture Educator, Vanderburgh County, IN

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Last week, my wife and I traveled down to Little Rock, Arkansas, to visit my daughter. Against my better judgement, we brought my two excitable golden retrievers with us. Some of the random observations I made during the trip:

Wild Callery pears are EVERYWHERE! While these offspring of Bradford pears haven't begun to bud out locally, they were in full bloom in Arkansas. Mile after mile along the interstate, I could see scrubby, thorny wild pears blooming on the edges of woods and along fence lines. These invasive trees are displacing native plants, and need to be removed as soon as possible. While it's unlikely that the state highway departments will act on this any time soon, individuals should cut these trees down now (while they're easy to identify...they're the first white-blooming tree visible). After cutting the tree to the ground, paint the fresh stump with concentrated glyphosate (Roundup) to prevent it from resprouting.

I've long complained about Hoosiers who incorrectly prune crape myrtle by hacking it back...a type of pruning called "crape murder." I thought it was just something us ignorant northerners do to this magnificent small tree. Nope! I saw hundreds of crape myrtles throughout Missouri and Arkansas, and every single one of them had been butchered. These are trees that should get to 20 feet tall, but people keep insisting on turning them into 3 foot shrubs! The result is leggy shrubs with scraggly tops, which soon get the appearance of witches' brooms. I can almost understand this if this plant was mistakenly planted too close to the house...but most of these were out in the open, in locations where a small tree would be more attractive than a small bush!

I saw a surprisingly large amount of mistletoe growing in the tops of trees. Not just in the rural areas, but in the city parks, too. Didn't seem to be hurting anything, even though it is a parasite.

As a treat, I took my two dogs to their very first dog park. What a neat an experience this was! During our two visits, there were between 10 and 20 other dogs running around, chasing tennis balls, chewing on sticks, and socializing. Every dog got scratches by every human; every human ooh'ed and ah'ed about everyone else's cute pup. The trees in the park provided needed shade; I would probably have put in some sort of fencing a couple of feet from the trunks, to protect the bark from "territory marking." The grass was awfully thin, due to the constant wear and tear of hundreds of paws; someone had optimistically scattered grass seed in the thin spots, but I don't expect much to come from that compacted soil. This might be a good place for some of that new, improved Bermudagrass I've been reading about.

I hope you get a chance to travel this year. If you do, take in the horticultural sights, as well as the touristy things. If you see anything really bizarre (horticulturally-speaking), please email a picture to me at LCaplan@purdue.edu.