

Friday 18 March 2022

Dear Everyone

With all the tragedies of war in Ukraine, I thought I would write about *arbor vitae* in the general sense of hope in nature.

Spring does seem to be having a good old go at turning up, and some of the scents from the gardens in the city are at moments transporting.

I am a fan of trees. I have a number of tree books and, one day, will take the time to learn to identify them. Unlike some, I am not blessed with the ability to memorise such things easily. My cousin was a keen ornithologist when we were growing up, and he learned all the garden birds from an illustrated poster on the wall of their kitchen at home. There is enormous pleasure to be had from being able to recall this kind of knowledge. Wild flower names are another. For others it is dinosaurs, the lists of players in a team, composers, collectable training shoes, artists, models of car...

For part of my Saturdays, I drink tea made with loose leaf tea, Royal Blend if I'm feeling flush, or else Assam (I'm aiming for pseud's corner in *Private Eye*), and flick through the pages of the *Weekend FT* as I look out at the garden.

We have two trees. An apple, ancient and tired but loved, and a cherry blossom, now very mature and gangly against the oversized evergreen berberis and viburnum that sit next to and behind it. The person who comes to sort them all out every couple of years is an arborist whose imagination and love for trees was captured as a child. I'm sure I've mentioned him before – his family name is Twigger. True. Not for him the hours in front of screens.

The article that caught my eye last weekend was '*How much is a tree worth?*' Whips can start at 30p, and the more mature, and the most popular at 3.5 meters, cost about £150, with a lead time for growth of five to seven years.

We all know the pejorative phrase, to know the cost of everything but the value of nothing, and in this sense the cost of a tree is only the spreadsheet part of its value. Although, as a 'hedge', excuse the pun, the cost value of trees is very attractive, "When timber markets crash..." the asset keeps growing.

The number of the most successful trees available to local authorities have narrowed because of climate change, with fewer trees able to withstand the challenge of sudden changes in weather patterns. Yet, the right trees add value by absorbing carbon, help with storm water attenuation, create habitats for many species, and offer shade in the heat of the day, in what Kenton Rogers calls “ecosystems services”. The Victorians were ahead of the game, and a great many of the London plane trees (*Platanus hispanica*) we see today were planted in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and continue to provide both ecosystem services and an aesthetic beauty, which is priceless.

May we rest our weary eyes on the green leaf emerging.

Here is composer John Rutter’s response to the war in Ukraine.

*Good Lord, protect Ukraine, give her strength, courage, faith, hope. Amen.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJI3kVwI2-U>

Best wishes

Simon