



## Backyard Wisdom • May 2016

by: *Gilbert A Smith, ISA Master Arborist*

### *Interview with a Tree*

#### *Eastern Redcedar, Juniperus Chinensis*

**Gil:** Mr. Redcedar lives near *Daniel Wright Forest Preserve* looking out over Milwaukee Avenue. I bet you've seen a lot of growth and change in your lifetime Mr. Redcedar.

**Red:** It wasn't so long ago that all around Milwaukee Road the prairie was plowed into farm fields. Yes, I've seen changes, but I thrive on change. Like your ancestors, I'm a pioneer. That means that when there's a disturbance, like a road being built, I jump in and grow where other trees can't.

**Gil:** Tell us what is the best thing people can do to help their trees?

**Red:** Well, my friend, Mr. Maple already talked about mulching. I understand Ms. Oak told you not to worry about a few bugs or spots and to have a tree-friend keeping an eye on us. So I was just dreaming about the way I was trimmed last year by one of your crew. The way she lovingly removed the dead wood from my branches, so careful not to leave stubs or cut into my living cambium which made it easy to close over the cut. Wonderful! That arborist, climbed thoughtfully, separating crossing branches and clearing me away from the pathway without harming me.

**Gil:** So she gave you a good hair cut did she?

**Red:** Don't you ever say that horrible thing again!

**Gil:** Im sorry. I was just making pleasant conversation. What did I say that offended you?

**Red:** It is not very pleasant when you treat my living branches as if they were something dead to be cut merely because you think it looks better. Where do you think we get our food anyway?



*Eastern Redcedar;  
Photos by Lesley Bruce Smith*



**Gil:** Well I thought everyone knew, don't you get your food from the soil?

**Red:** Absolutely not! Even a one year old sapling knows that we get our water and minerals from the soil but we get our food from the sun! Our leaves and branches absorb the sun's energy and convert it through photosynthesis into food.

**Gil:** I'm just playing the devils advocate here, repeating things others have asked us to do. So, you don't like to be sheared or shaped or balanced so you fit nicely into the spot you were planted in?

**Red:** The devil's advocate indeed. No! A good planner puts trees where they can grow to their genetic size and express their natural beauty to soften your hard human made lines. **Cutting a tree hurts!** And if it is done carelessly it degrades and damages me and mine. I'm shaped the way I am most beautiful, thank you.

**Gil:** You are beautiful Red, you're tough and the incense from your needles and wood is just heavenly. Thanks for hanging in there and dressing up our ugly construction sites.

**Red:** No, thank you for making a place for me to pioneer and homestead.