



Tree of the Month

Weeping Willow, *Salix babylonica*

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Photos by Lesley Bruce Smith

Weeping Willows are one of those tree species that have captured the imagination of artists down through the centuries. This is a tree native to China, yet Linnaeus named the Weeping Willow, *Salix babylonica* to honor the willows mentioned in the Bible. The Hebrews, exiled to Babylon: *“wept when we remembered Zion (and) we hanged our harps upon the willow in the midst thereof”.*



Spring Willow

Supposedly the heavy harps hung in the branches of the willows, pulling them down where they remained ever after. Biblical scholars spoiled the story by deciding that those “willows” were really Poplars but by then they were named and so the Willows have been a weeping ever since.

In the winter landscape the Weeping Willows remain distinctive due to their bright pendulous orange twigs contrasting against the dark bark of the trunks. As the days lengthen to spring that orange color turns a beautiful chartreuse and is a standout in the blue of the spring sky. Always a sweet harbinger of warmer days to come.



Summer Willow

Willows are amazingly fast growing and are well known to love wet soil. Their wood is significantly heavier when live than after being harvested due to their massive uptake of water during growth. As arborists, we often refer to Willows as the Corvairs of the tree world because they are notorious for falling apart, and so we say they are “unsafe at any speed”. A forty year old Willow tree is a senior citizen where a forty year old Oak hasn’t even reached the prime of life.

Probably one of the greatest gifts the Willow has given us is the infusions from the bark yielding acetylsalicylic acid, long known for it’s properties to alleviate aches and pains and the main ingredient of aspirin. Aspirin is still surprising us with newly discovered healing properties.

A 9th century Chinese gardener, Ji-Cheng, wrote “A curving bay of willows in the moonlight cleanses the soul”

ref: Lives of the Trees, An Uncommon History, by: Diana Wells