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In our Collection

The Katsura Collection

Michael Dosmann, Curator of Living Collections



Nancy Rose

Above, among the accessions of *C. japonica* situated near the Meadow Road entrance to Linden Path stands this 45-year-old individual (1150-67), captured at the peak of its fall color.

The heart of the Arboretum's katsura (*Cercidiphyllum*) collection lies along Meadow Road, a short walk from the Visitor Center. The genus comprises two species: the lesser known *Cercidiphyllum magnificum* of Japan, and *C. japonicum* of China and Japan. The latter includes our oldest accessions (882*A and 882*B), acquired as seed from Japan in 1878. Now showing their advanced age, the two trees possess numerous stems, many of which have exhibited decline in recent years. However, like a phoenix, this species is adept at regeneration, and 882*B in particular has produced copious basal sprouts. With continued encouragement, these will become the dominant trunks of these individuals in the future.

In curating the Living Collections, future planning plays a critical role, particularly regarding their prudent development. When I started in 2007, the Arboretum possessed a number of fine katsuras, but the collection lacked diversity: there were no accessions of *C. magnificum*, and—except for a small tree from China that later died—all of our wild-collected individuals of *C. japonicum* originated in Japan. Although single specimens can really catch the eye, *Cercidiphyllum* truly dazzles when planted in groves. The open space to the west of Meadow Road seemed perfect for this treatment and recent additions of diverse, wild-collected accessions of *C. magnificum* and *C. japonicum* now create a well-spaced ensemble to beckon passersby in all seasons. Springtime brings forth reddish-bronze leaves, which become blue-green for the summer, and in autumn turn shades of clear yellow to plum (and emit a pleasing scent of caramel or burnt brown sugar). During winter, one can inspect the handsome trunks, and persistent banana-shaped fruits on female trees.

One tree (12-2007*A) among our more recent acquisitions offers an interesting back story. As a graduate student, I collected *C. japonicum* seed in Shaanxi Province, China, which I shared with several arboreta. This distribution proved fortunate, for none of the germination efforts succeeded except those of the Holden Arboretum in Ohio. Several of their rooted cuttings were offered to me in 2005, and today one of these provides further depth to the Arboretum's collection. It seems that while propagating plants from seed can be a frustrating process, sharing your bounty with others can reward you in ways you didn't expect. ♪