

## Upcoming Roland Park plant sale might resolve gardening dilemma

*Hudson's Corner*

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The back line of our boxwoods is dying from the incorrigible fungus that has run rampant through Baltimore boxwoods in the last dozen years.

For decades these seven billowy mounds provided the backdrop for our garden. Now the white fence and the Leyland cypresses behind do it.

The capped brick columns and white spindles of our fence, designed in the mid-1920s, are as elegant as the boxwoods, but not the Leyland cypresses that are dwindling in the shade of the Japanese zelkova I probably should not have planted 20 years ago.

The zelkova is not native to Maryland. Its roots, the pros say, take nutrition from the shallow-rooted boxwoods.

One boxwood underneath the zelkova is gone, leaving a big gap. Two on either side will be dead by summer's end.

I have been trying to think of suitable replacements. I've thought of white azaleas, but I don't think they're leafy enough to be a suitable garden backdrop or to provide enough sound absorption for Cold Spring Lane behind the fence.

A friend suggested native rhododendrons. Their slightly yellow-green hue, however, will not work well with the rest of the boxwoods in the yard.

Japanese maples, as understory trees to the towering zelkova, were also suggested. While Japanese maples are among my favorite trees, I don't think a row of them would look good against the fence. We need evergreens against those white spindles.

I hate to admit it, because many designers feel they are over-planted: for months I had been leaning toward cherry laurel bushes. Their broad, evergreen leaves would absorb a lot of sound. Their dark, glossy color would compliment the boxwoods, and they would not cost a fortune.

Then I started thinking that with all of the non-native trees I have planted -- the zelkova, two Yoshino cherries, one Okame cherry, two Foster hollies and five Leyland cypress -- I should think about adding natives to make this old garden more eco-friendly.

I turned to a handy magazine on native plants from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife services.

Almost immediately, I spotted mountain laurel, the very type that for years dazzled neighbors' front banks with pale pink and white flowers, until honeysuckle strangled them.

While mountain laurels are slow growing, not a problem here. I am in no hurry for the newly painted white fence to disappear.

Best of all, mountain laurels are native to Maryland. They tolerate all types of soil and amounts of sunlight.

They grow in swamps, so they will not mind the wet roots, which have plagued these boxwoods, on the downhill side of our garden. They grow in the woods, so I think they would be happy under the ever-spreading zelkova.

The Roland Park Civic League is sponsoring a native plant sale May 16 at 8 a.m. in front of the Roland Park

Library.

Here's hoping there's a container or two of *Kalmia latifolia*.

For once I would know just where in the garden I would plant an eager, late-spring purchase.

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