

Linden tree scent evokes memories

By Susan Yost, Ph.D.

Delaware State University

Right around this time of the year, a sweet fragrance from a tree will waft through the air and transport me back to my childhood.

"Nothing is more memorable than a smell," and "Smell is our most seductive and provocative sense" (Lyall Watson, in "Jacobson's Organ and the Remarkable Nature of Smell").

When linden trees (*Tilia* spp.) bloom in June, their fragrance is wonderfully sweet and strong. And, with it, a memory comes to me — the smell of the dozen or so linden trees that shaded my childhood playground in the Inwood section of New York City. With that delicious linden flower smell in the air, I am instantly transported back to the park with its swings, sandbox, monkey bars, "swimming pool" (about 12 inches deep), and lots of kids playing patsy (hopscotch), nok-hockey and hide-and-seek under the linden trees.

Of course, flowers' scents didn't evolve to please us humans, but rather probably to attract pollinators, such as honeybees. Linden honey is tasty.

Linden tea is popular in parts of Europe. It's easy to make by drying the flower cluster, and then steeping in water. The taste of the tea is pleasant, like the smell of the flowers, and has been used medicinally for colds, fever, high blood pressure, etc.

There are different species of linden, including the commonly planted little-leaf linden (*Tilia cordata*), and the native American basswood (*Tilia americana*), which grows in the piedmont of Delaware.

Basswood is another name for linden in North America, because of the fibrous inner bark. It is also known as lime tree (in Britain), and tilleul in parts of Europe.

The name of the well-known Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus originated with the linden tree. Linnaeus' father chose the family name "Linnaeus" after the old and respected "warden" linden tree growing on the family property.



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Linden trees, like this European linden (*Tilia x europaea*) planted on the campus of Delaware State University, scent the air with their delicious fragrance in early June.

Garden Tales

At this time, most Swedes still had no surnames and were named after their fathers, as in Nilson, Erikson, etc.

Another association with lindens: "Enter den Linden" is a famous boulevard in the historic district of Berlin. It was first planted with linden trees in the 1600s, and the present trees date to the 1950s.

What is your favorite fragrant plant memory? — the scent of a lilac bush drifting in through your house window, petunias growing in an aunt's garden, a vase of peonies, or maybe honeysuckle on a warm

summer's evening stroll?

Or maybe it's just inhaling the air of a forest, called "wood air breathing" by the Japanese, which I recently learned about in "Teaching the Trees" by Joan Maloof, and which may explain why I enjoy walking in woodlands so much.

On the campus of Delaware State University, the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations, and uses. Call 857-6452 (Dr. Susan Yost, herbarium educator) to arrange a tour of the herbarium, or for more information about this article.