

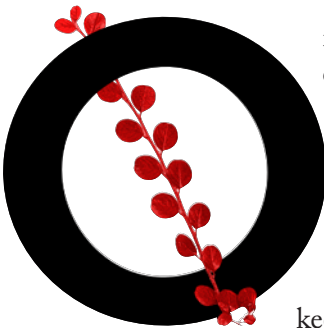
The Tree You Want



FIGURE 1.

Giant yellow bamboo (*Phyllostachys bambusoides*).

Image: © Board of Trustees, RBG, Kew.



In a windy day the trees sloshing in the sky snap-dangle, split-twist delivering firewood for winter west of the Cascades are Douglas firs.

The ones you want to see on hot subtropical days towering pillars pegging walks to support the eccentric spokes of their own colosseum feeding the crinkling of polished leaves as the grounds-keeper luxuriates in their sound are rubber trees.

No, the trees you want to hear on a windy day are the giant yellow bamboo with green striations clattering high swaying high swinging in circles holding the air inside them safe.

The purple trees you see are not trees but vines riding them—morning glories climbing before school opens overcome a dim chapel of brambles, ferrying up pouches of hansa yellow pollen keeping bees busy until dusk.

The volunteers you don't want setting up deep in the loam or pretending to hold up your ad hoc rock retainer wall will really bring it down, tasty cherries tossed by satisfied squirrels, dropped by birds arriving from wintering far south.

The trees you want to see if you're a nesting stork grow tall and lanky with few branches, like telephone poles, any will do, if you can find one.



FIGURE 2.

Frangipani 'chicken-egg' flowers (*Plumeria rubra*).

Image: © Osbel López Francisco & Mariano Gorostiza Salazar.

The trees you want to breathe in the spring are the *Plumeria* or frangipani ‘chicken-egg’ flowers with bulbous branches in mini lotus-like closed irises of blossoms pastel gradient to pistils, bring joy with no need to turn to see—the scent!

Runner-up to get a whiff of—blooming all but winter—really a bush, the *Osmanthus* planted to mask the swirling ochre sheen of canals.

Dragon fruit climb high through the pine gyring apart culminating arcs concentrating black on overcast forms of gravity, hold; the tree calls uncle.

Some trees, so old and complicated, people tie red ribbons around, build small shrines kneeling at their roots and tiny garden islands for them, so traffic drives around them.

The tree you want to lean into to feel it lean back is the ‘thousand-layered’, weeping paperbark, palms out, dig fingers in to hold it soft, not budging, springing back damp, cool, alive.

The trickiest fruit to pick: Italian plums in late summer—be quick to catch the crisp yellow flesh while still green on the outside; gone yellow they’ll be rolling like marmalade on bald spots of lawn sprouting maggots.

The tree my neighbors point to from the porch before passing me the binoculars downhill, a lone fir bald eagles prefer for a perch—watching the eagles raise their eaglet, awaiting its tumble into flight.

The tree you want between neighbors that makes for good and friendly neighbors though not too wide yet sidelines the path with its slow hardwood and thick trunk jutting prickly to the touch is the holly.

Banana trees gather in clumped dozens shredded threadbare by typhoons dangling to dry but no time—lush unfurling deep green

with drooping heavy blood-maroon flowers heavy, steady as
bloated plumb-bobs.

The trees the Malayan night herons prefer sprawl leafy long enough for
no one to see their nest inconspicuous in the sky but splattering
guano on the path to the banana patch.

Best cone design goes to the Cypress, the way they hang like connect-
the-dot Christmas lights burnt out, though children prefer
pinecones, the big ones that check your blood when you pick
them up.

The banyan is the tree to tie vines for children to swing standing or sit-
ting, keeping clear of rocks and hard ditches, the tree of Tarzan
screaming from one to the other.

No tree but pine—growing straight up through them—can grow in the
interstices.

Their maze of stiletto roots claims nothing can survive but the dirt:
from tiniest seeds birds deposit on rooftops and rolling anywhere
under our feet sprouting terror

the banyan, monster of trees bores long lolling roots down pipes, thick-
ening, breaking, rising to sunlight and rain tumbling open walls

and a first leaf over a wall overtakes the world that was and leaves shapes
of new roofs and walls out of themselves

from every new center of direction a jungle canopy holds light to, the
little tree done good.



FIGURE 3.

Rubber tree (*Ficus elastica*).

Image: © Dean Brink

Dean Anthony Brink is a poet, painter and professor of literature and Japanese thought. Reflecting the complications of living across cultures in the shadow of tense geopolitics, his poetry and artwork explore paths to peace by way of social and ecological justice, building greater empathy in the world through a sort of traveling humor. Recent poems have appeared in *Ecozon@*, *New Writing (UK)*, *Wayfarer*, and the book *No Time and Other Poems* (Goldfish Press, 2024). He also publishes speculative fiction featuring nonbinary protagonists as well as nonhuman sentience, and is the author of several research monographs, including *Poetics and Justice in America, Japan, and Taiwan: Configuring Change and Entitlement* (Lexington Books, 2021) and *Philosophy of Science and the Kyoto School: An Introduction to Nishida Kitarō, Tanabe Hajime and Tosaka Jun* (Bloomsbury, 2021).

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