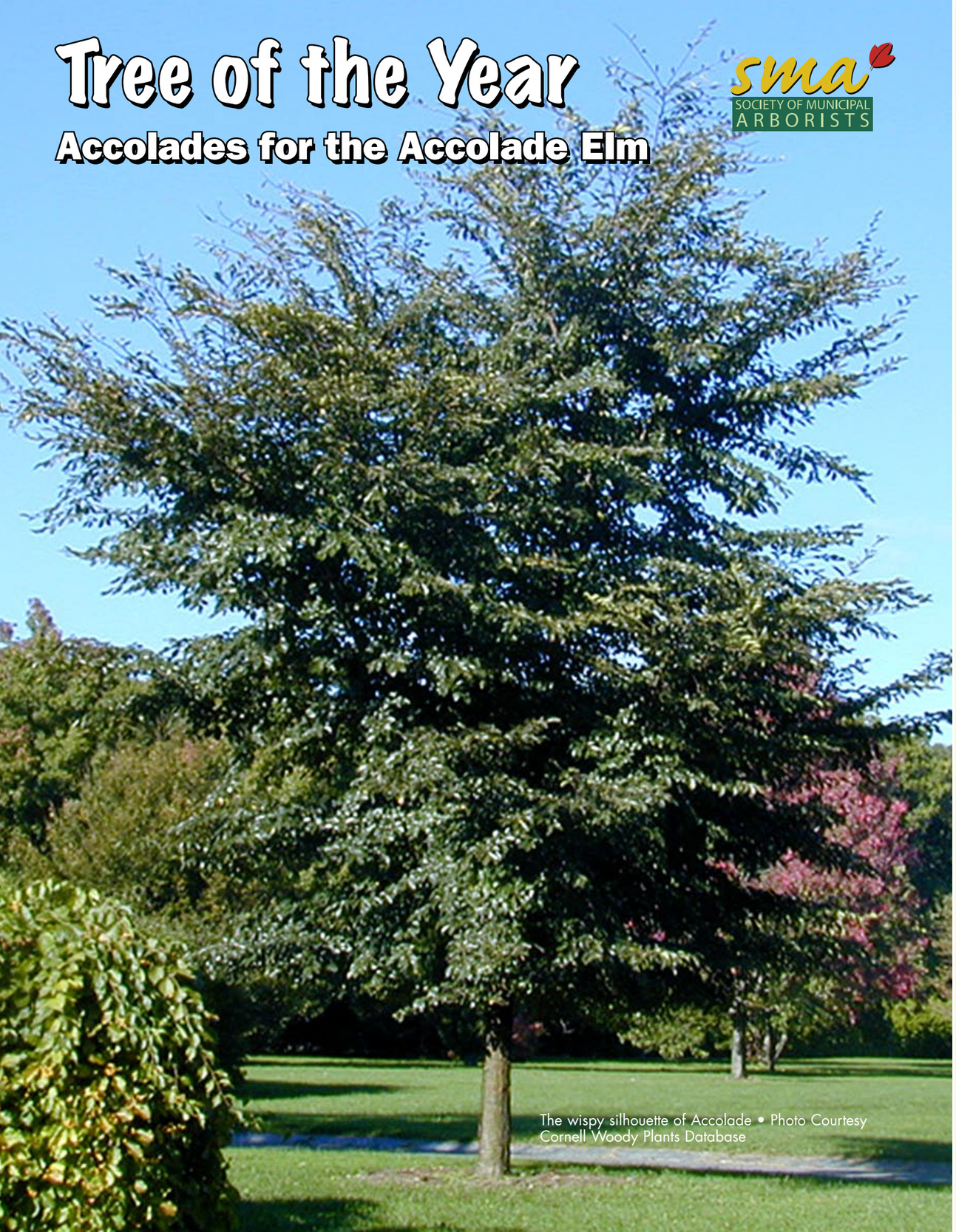
Tree of the Year

Accolades for the Accolade Elm



The wispy silhouette of Accolade • Photo Courtesy Cornell Woody Plants Database

Accolade™ is the trade name and 'Morton' is the cultivar name for the hybrid Asian elm tree that's been named SMA Urban Tree of the Year 2012. (Here we refer to it simply as Accolade.) Accolade's parents are *Ulmus japonica* and *U. wilsoniana,* and it's this hybrid that jump-started the Morton Arboretum's elm improvement program in 1972.

At that time, Morton Research Dendrologist George Ware took note of a beautiful hybrid elm outside the Morton's Thornhill Education Center—where it had been planted in 1924— and took cuttings. That "Thornhill Elm" was grown from seed distributed by the Arnold Arboretum. It became supremely important to Dr. Ware's elm breeding efforts for the subsequent 40 years, and it was eventually introduced into the trade as Accolade.

Accolade demonstrates an ultimate habit that is upright and American elm-like, but more compact. It can be expected to reach 40 to 60 feet (12.2 to 18.3 m) in height and 35 to 40 feet (10.7 to 12.2 m) in spread. It is reliably hardy to Zone 4.

The rich green, glossy foliage of Accolade • Photo Courtesy of J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co.

Accolade fall color • Photo Courtesy of J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co.

The Professionals on Accolade

Ohio was hit hard by Dutch elm disease (DED) during the 20th century. Call it fear, or call it prudence, but I have been very slow to embrace the "new" elms. Fear of DED has not been the primary reason for my reluctance. My biggest concern is actually the elm leaf beetles and other foliar pests that seem to plague many of the hybrid and exotic elms planted in our communities. If I wanted a tree that was defoliated by early August, I would just plant an Ohio buckeye (*Aesculus glabra*).

I'm happy to say that Accolade elm has made me a believer in the future of *Ulmus*. The foliage stays clean and crisp all summer, and fall color is a respectable yellow that contributes to the Midwest's autumn palette. In addition, Accolade has impressed me with its ease of establishment and its robust growth rate. In an era when we seem to be deleting species from our recommended plant lists at an unprecedented rate, it's great to be able to bring elm back into our streetscape mix.

—Steve Cothrel, Superintendent of Parks and Forestry, Upper Arlington, Ohio

Accolade performs well in a parking lot trial conducted by J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co. Photo Courtesy of J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co.

My first urban forestry position was in Brookfield, Illinois in the late 1970s. In the early part of that decade, Dubois Avenue in Brookfield was listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as a natural tunnel where the elm canopy was so dense, cars had to drive with their headlights on during the day. Today, most of those trees are gone.

There have not been many trees that we can use in our cities that duplicate the great vase-shaped crown and canopy of the American elm (*Ulmus americana*). Accolade has a similar crown shape and now is more available for use. One of the challenges we face is finding high quality nursery stock of urban tree species that are not necessarily common or specified by landscape architects. We need to cooperate with neighboring communities to contract-grow and specify tree lists that motivate nurseries to grow the species we want to plant in urban areas, such as Accolade. And remember to plant diverse species ...

—Gordon Mann, Owner, Mann Made Resources Consulting Arborists and Urban Foresters, Auburn, California

My very first forestry job was inventorying and marking DED-affected trees for Cook County, Illinois Forestry. I was just learning about trees and realized how many shade trees in my home region that I loved were elms. Recently, I was the city forester in Albuquerque where I couldn't plant elms at all due to a pollen restriction ordinance. That led me to watch elms wherever I went on trips home or conferences—and Accolade was in many places doing great things. I watched for them because I missed them, and Accolade is one I am glad I can plant again now that I'm back in the Midwest.

—Nick Kuhn, Community Forestry and Communications, Missouri Department of Conservation

Accolade trunk • Photo by Pat Breen, Oregon State University

Chico, California Accolade in 2006 (left) and (right) the same tree in 2011 • Photos by Chris Boza and Denice Britton

About that Vase Shape

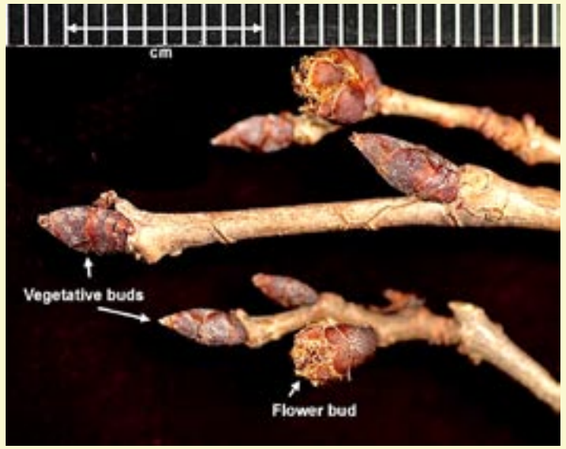
In his 2002 paper, "New Elms for the Landscape and Urban Forest," Morton Researcher Dr. Fredric Miller explained how the attractive shape of Accolade came about.

> Study of the growth patterns of the parents of the hybrid elm [*Ulmus japonica* and *U. wilsoniana*] revealed that Japanese elm is moderately slow-growing with twig growth ceasing in early summer. This early-summer growth produces a somewhat compact crown. In contrast, Wilson elm continues twig and branchlet elongation throughout the summer, creating an umbrella effect. Japanese elm is native to both northeastern China and Japan especially in relatively cold areas with rather short growing seasons, hence, the early cessation of twig growth. Wilson elm is native to the mountains of central and western China, with a longer growing season.

Accolade is one of the most vigorously growing trees we have ever planted in Ithaca, New York. Its sibling from the same cross, Danada Charm™ ('Morton Red Tip') is also exceptionally speedy. When young, Accolade is somewhat gangly with numerous limbs growing up and out, but not long ago, I saw the original mature Accolade at the Morton Arboretum and it was spectacular, reminiscent of the tall arched form of the American elm. It also has handsome dark green summer color and reasonably good yellow fall color.

These hybrid elms have become deservedly popular. They are resistant to DED and reportedly resistant to elm yellows as well. They are easy to plant bare root and have a large, highly branched root system. Like other elms, they are highly tolerant of alkaline soil and wet or dry soil conditions. The only danger is of overplanting as their ease of transplanting and vigorous growth in the face of difficult conditions makes them the default tree for tough spots.

—Nina Bassuk, Urban Horticulture Institute Director, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York



Flower and vegetative buds of Accolade • Photo by Pat Breen, Oregon State University

In 1873, Chico, California Founder John Bidwell planted 56 American elms in the central plaza of the City. By 2003, any remaining elms had been removed due to structural deficiencies. During the plaza reconstruction design process, we recommended Accolade as a replacement and in 2006, twelve Accolade elms were planted during the final phases of the plaza reconstruction.

Over the past six growing seasons, the Accolade trees have grown exceedingly fast. This fast growth rate may be due to the specific cultivar selection, the site soil conditions, the planting technique, or all three. The average Accolade diameter is 9 inches (23 cm) DBH, with an average height of 30 feet (9.1 m). They have required extensive structural pruning because of their fast growth.

There is a second planting of Accolade in Chico on DeGarmo Drive. These trees were planted by another contract and did not receive the same thorough attention as the plaza trees. The DeGarmo Drive trees are in their third season of growth and only this year has growth rate equaled that of the trees at the plaza; the average DBH is 3.5 inches (9 cm), with an average height of 15 feet (4.6 m). They have more horizontal branching and will receive their first structural prune this winter.

The trees have had a few minor infestations of elm leaf beetle, but it has not necessitated control. Last year was the worst in terms of beetle damage, this year the best. That may be weather related more than tree related. In all, the Accolade elms have performed well in Chico.

—Chris Boza (formerly of Chico, California), Hayden, Idaho, Community Forester and Denice Britton, Chico, California, Urban Forest Manager

Announcing the New SMA Urban Forestry Best Management Practices

See How Green Communities are $mart Communities

Please visit *www.urban-forestry.com* to see and use the new BMPs!

SMA has developed a set of Urban Forestry Best Management Practices (BMPs) for use by municipal arborists, planners, urban foresters, concerned citizens, green industry professionals, or anyone interested in creating and sustaining trees and green space in their communities. They are designed to be simple, easy to understand, and versatile for anyone wishing to explain, understand, or investigate the many ways in which green development makes good economic sense. The series of BMP documents utilize visual imagery to describe various management techniques and benefits. Each is supplemented with a list of internet links providing greater detail, applicable tools, examples, and other citations to reinforce each topic.

Formatted into three main topics, the documents take a look at WHY trees are important to communities, WHERE trees fit into a community, and WHO works with and manages community trees. These colorful flyers are ideal for use at local events, as educational materials, or as support material for program development.

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