

## Dealing with Reversion

Sandy Welches, MGV '05

So, what, you may ask, is reversion? Well, it can be a problem for many trees and shrubs. It occurs when a plant selected for some novel characteristic of the leaves, flowers or fruit 'reverts' back to the original look of the parent plant. The term is most often used to describe variegated shrubs or trees that produce all-green shoots from within a variegated leaf canopy. *Reversion usually occurs in spring or summer, often as a response to temperature fluctuations.*

Plants that produce desirable characteristics, such as variegated leaves, are important to the nursery trade. Shoots selected from 'sports' (*mutations*) on otherwise purely green plants can be propagated, and are an important source of new cultivars. They can be increased by cuttings, grafting or division. However, the mutations within these plants are not always stable, hence they can be prone to lapsing into the all-green of their parent.

### Plants prone to reversion

Variegated-leaf cultivars of trees and shrubs, especially *Acer* (maples), *Buxus* (boxwood), conifers, *Elaeagnus*, *Euonymus*, *Fuchsia* and *Ilex* (hollies) are the plants most notably affected by reversion. *If left, the more vigorous all-green shoots, which contain more chlorophyll, will take over the plant. They should be cut back into the wood containing variegated foliage.* Some variegated plants need to have this treatment throughout their life to keep the reverted shoots under control.

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