

Treeways

2018 - 2

Trees in Winter

Live trees may look dead in winter but they are very much alive. They are “resting” during their dormant period and waiting for spring. Even during winter when the wood or branches get above about 50 degrees F. the trees actively respire or do photosynthesis. The twigs and thin barked branches also have active chlorophyll. Not all chlorophyll is in the leaves.

In the unfrozen soil layer below the frost line the tree’s roots are active all winter. I have dug up roots in winter and it is true. Watch the buds swell especially on silver maples in the late winter. They will swell to much larger than they were in the fall even though there is still snow and the ground is still frozen. How do the trees do that? How do they know when? Isn’t it just magical? Science can tell us why and how and when and isn’t it still just magical and wonderful?

Winter is the best time to appreciate the shape and structure of trees. Without leaves trees show off their unique physical shapes and architecture. With a little practice, you can learn to identify trees as you drive by just by their architecture. I hope you take advantage this winter of a different and unique way to see trees differently.

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