

# ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION GROUP

## BY TERRY BONACE

Most people of a certain age have grown up with a bottle of witch hazel astringent in their medicine cabinet. Did you know that the source of this home remedy is a small, native tree (*Hamamelis virginiana*) that is abundant in Beverly Shores? It is also quite an unusual tree in that it blooms in late October – the latest blooming, flowering woody plant in our area. You may have overlooked it for years. Witch hazel grows in the understory, beneath our taller oaks and maples. Its fruits provide an important food source for squirrels in summer. In late August you may hear a great deal of clamoring in your witch hazel trees as squirrels feast on their seed capsules.



Witch Hazel Flowers



Witch Hazel Leaves

Witch hazel flowers begin blooming as its leaves turn yellow and fall off. The flowers are small, strap-like yellow petals that form a tangle close along the tree's stems. The "hazel" part of the name may relate to the similarity of its leaves to hazelnut, another native shrub in Northwest Indiana (but much less common). The leaves, with their toothed margins, can be 4 to 5 inches long and 2 to 3 inches wide. The "witch" part of the name is more complicated and is said to relate to the use of the witch hazel sticks for finding water (a "dowsing stick" or "divining rod," a/k/a "wicke" or "wych" in Middle English.)

If you wish to purchase and plant a native witch hazel, they are available from nurseries. However, be sure to ask for *Hamamelis virginiana* because there are other, non-native witch hazels offered for sale too. *Hamamelis vernalis*, the Ozark witch hazel or vernal witch hazel, called such because it blooms in the early spring, is native to Arkansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. *Hamamelis mollis* is a Chinese witch hazel. *Hamamelis x intermedia* is a Japanese and Chinese witch hazel hybrid. The ERG will be glad to help identify the plant for you. Don't hesitate to contact Terry Bonace ([tbonace@gmail.com](mailto:tbonace@gmail.com)) or Candice Smith ([candicepetersonsmith@gmail.com](mailto:candicepetersonsmith@gmail.com)) for assistance. Also please visit our website at [www.bserg.org](http://www.bserg.org) for further information on native and invasive plants.