

Know Your Neighbors: Plants at MetroHealth

By Jill Collins

INTRODUCTION

I think about the plants at MetroHealth and who might have planted them and why. I've tried to find out who made the courtyard so beautiful and why there are birches in some spots but not others and who decided on lindens, but the answers to these questions have remained elusive. Many of the plants that populate the green spaces at MetroHealth's main campus were selected because of how their appearances make people feel and, for me, seeing certain plants every day gives me a feeling of peace before I walk into the emergency department.

I'm lucky to have studied and worked with plants at Warren Wilson College, the Cleveland Botanical Garden, and John Carroll University. People at those places taught me all sorts of things and told me unusual, interesting stories about plants. I often think about what I was told and wish I could know more, but I've lost touch with some of the people I once knew, and others are gone. More than anything though, through those amazing people, I learned an alternative way to view the world.

Green space leads to faster recovery times for patients (Grahm et al., 2017) and a reduction in stress for hospital staff (Cordoza et al., 2018; Cui et al., 2022). Green space increases healing (*see* Dobson, 2018; Patwary et al., 2024; Ulrich, 2002).

I would like to give staff and visitors more information about the plants here at MetroHealth and their role in healing. The plants in this book are grouped as ornamentals, weeds, or trees and shrubs. I hope you enjoy the following information.

ORNAMENTALS

The ornamental plantings in parks, cemeteries, and other locations give clues as to when plantings might have occurred and what plants were popular historically. At the corner of Scranton Road and MetroHealth Drive at MetroHealth Main Campus, myrtle and daffodils, locusts and yews, and hostas and birches grow. These elegant plants are similar to what might be found in the quieter areas of the Cleveland Botanical Garden. They are many shades of green and white; calming and timeless.

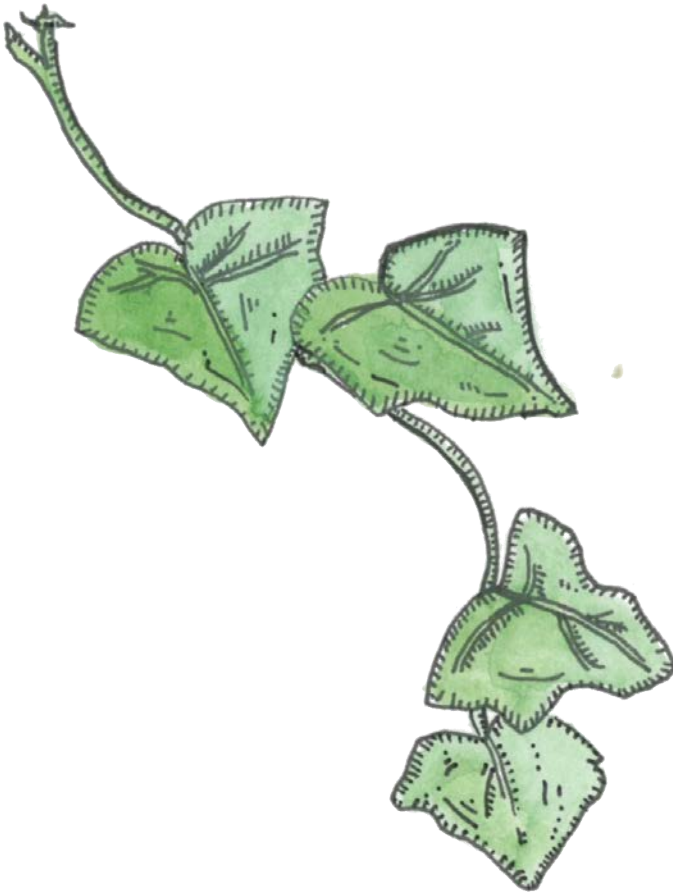
Daffodils (*Narcissus spp.*)

Daffodils should get more credit. They are lovely flowers that persist along the Rapid Transit tracks and in vacant lots long after their planters are gone. Plant daffodils or give some to your neighbors and you have achieved immortality. They have a pleasant scent, especially old varieties. In Cleveland, daffodils are worth seeing everywhere, but are especially nice at Lakeview Cemetery. At MetroHealth, daffodils at the corner of Scranton Road and MetroHealth Drive are paired with myrtle, adding contrast and subtle beauty to the landscaping.



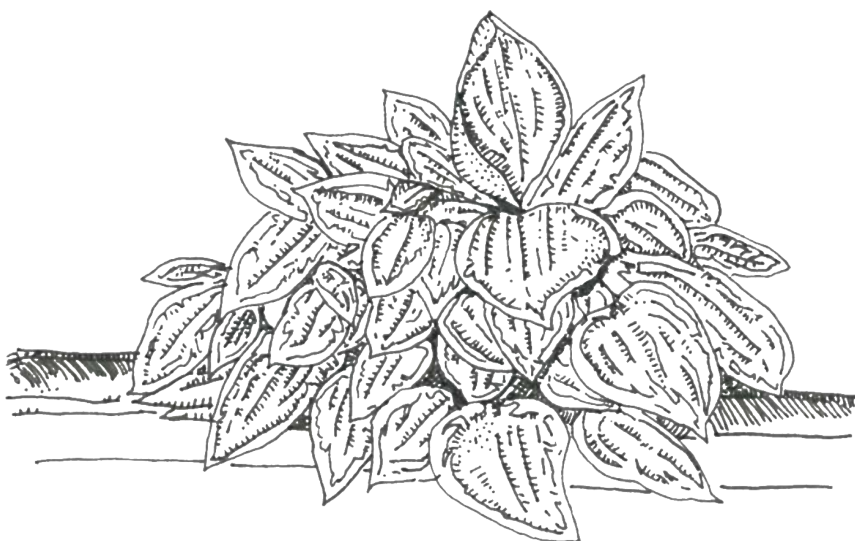
English Ivy (*Hedera helix*)

English Ivy is a common ground cover. Like myrtle, it is viewed as invasive, but, like myrtle, I don't often see it in woodland areas. Here at MetroHealth, English Ivy grows in the main campus courtyard.



Hostas (*Hosta spp.*)

Good for shady spots, hostas come in a surprising number of sizes and white-green-blue color variations. Hostas are common yard plantings. Hostas are also perennials that can be given as gifts. The hostas in my yard all remind me of somewhere or someone. The Cleveland Botanical Garden has quite an amazing selection of hostas on Hosta Hill. At MetroHealth there are hostas by the emergency department entrance on Scranton Road, in Quad Park, and between lanes across from the old front entrance.



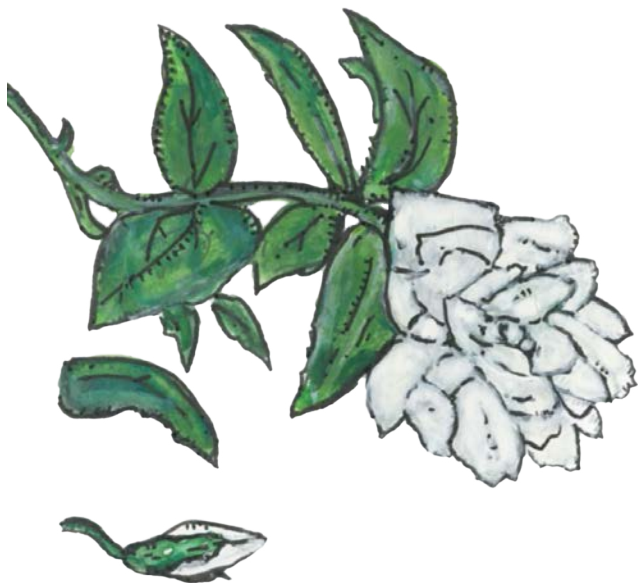
Myrtle (*Vinca minor*)

Found in Cleveland in yards and gardens, myrtle is a fine ground cover. It is considered invasive. Not to say that it isn't invasive, but I don't often see it in the Metroparks or Cuyahoga Valley, though I do see it in lots and old homesteads where it has escaped from cultivation or where it continues to grow after land use has changed. Here at MetroHealth, myrtle is paired with daffodils at the corner of Scranton Road and MetroHealth Drive.



Roses (*Rosa spp.*)

Roses may be considered cliché in our culture but that doesn't prevent them from looking gorgeous. They can be found in gardens, cemeteries, parks, and other landscapes in Cleveland. Rose fruits, called hips, are edible and a good source of vitamin C. The fruit can be dried and steeped as tea, eaten raw, or made into jelly. If you try tasting the hips, avoid the inner hairs which irritate the digestive system. There is a white rose that blooms beautifully in May or June at the corner of Scranton Road and MetroHealth Drive.



WEEDS

Ecologically speaking, perhaps they are not useful, but they are interesting. Temporary and fast growing, weeds tell you a lot about the soil and the available seed bank of a given area. The variety of weeds and how they change in the city is surprising to me. Some weeds are everywhere one summer never to be seen again while others come back year after year. The original apothecary; some weeds were brought to the United States as medicines. Maybe stop and — maybe not smell, as many weeds stink, but — at least look at them more often.

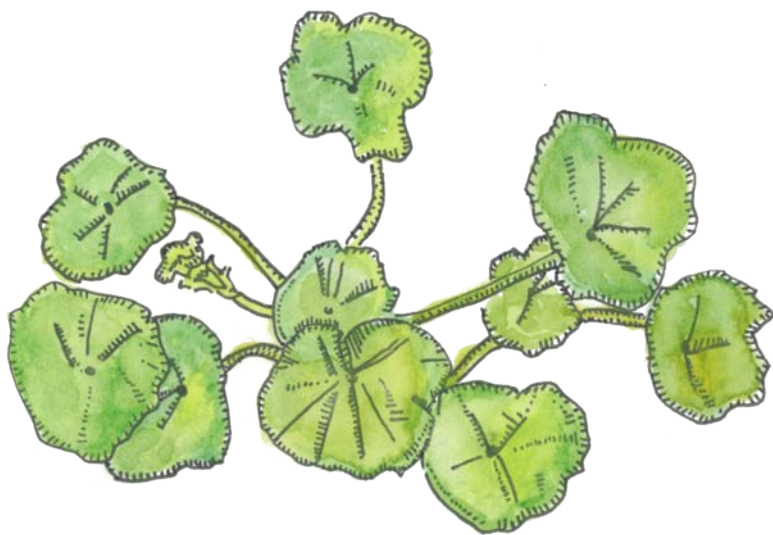
Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)

The dandelion is well-known as an edible weed. Best in early spring, leaves can be used in salads; flowers can be made into wine; and roots can be roasted and, when steeped, yield a drink similar in taste to coffee. Dandelions can be found in lawns, yards, and garden beds. At MetroHealth, I've seen them in grassy areas at Quad Park.



Common mallow (*Malva neglecta*)

Apparently edible and used as a soup base in China, I have been wanting to try eating this plant but haven't gotten around to it. Similar in appearance to Carolina geranium, but common mallow is distinguishable by its leaves which are much more circular. Common mallow can be found sometimes at MetroHealth in the garden bed by the emergency room entrance on Scranton Road.



Mulberry (*Morus alba*)

Mulberries have edible fruits and many leaf shapes. I see mulberries with purple fruit far more often in the city than trees with white fruit. One of the only mulberry trees I have seen with white fruit grows in the alley between West 45th Street and West 47th Street close to Bridge Avenue. The purple fruited mulberries are everywhere a plant can grow in the city. They are fast growing trees that seem to be able to squeeze themselves into small areas and establish themselves close to fences where they find refuge from lawnmowers. At MetroHealth, mulberries grow in the garden beds by the emergency room entrance on Scranton Road.



Bittersweet Nightshade (*Solanum dulcamara*)

Nightshade has purple deadly-looking flowers. The poisonous fruit ripens at different times so the plant usually has green, yellowish orange, and red fruits like a traffic light where all three light colors are turned on at once. At MetroHealth, this plant grows in the garden bed by the emergency entrance on Scranton Road.



Common and Narrow-leaved Plantain

(*Plantago major*; *Plantago lanceolata*)

Plantain is my favorite weed. I push it on family and friends all the time. It relieves pain, decreases swelling, and can be useful for minor irritations like insect bites. Crush the leaves and apply directly to skin. It is also edible. A common lawn weed, plantain can also be found in garden beds and in sidewalk cracks. At MetroHealth, plantain can sometimes be found in grassy areas or amongst ornamental plantings.



TREES AND SHRUBS

Trees and shrubs can be identified with clues such as their buds, branches (alternate or opposite), bark, overall shape, leaves, and sexual parts. Many trees have edible parts or interesting stories to tell. When in a new and unfamiliar place, finding a tree you can identify, like a familiar face, means a lot.

Crabapple (*Malus spp.*)

All crabapples are edible, but some are so sour that one lick dries out your mouth. Others have a pleasant tang and sweetness. They were once more widely used for jelly, sauce, and cider. These trees are planted as ornamentals for their bright fruits and marvelous flower displays. They can be found throughout the city. At MetroHealth, you can see them in Quad Park and by the emergency department entrance on Scranton Road.



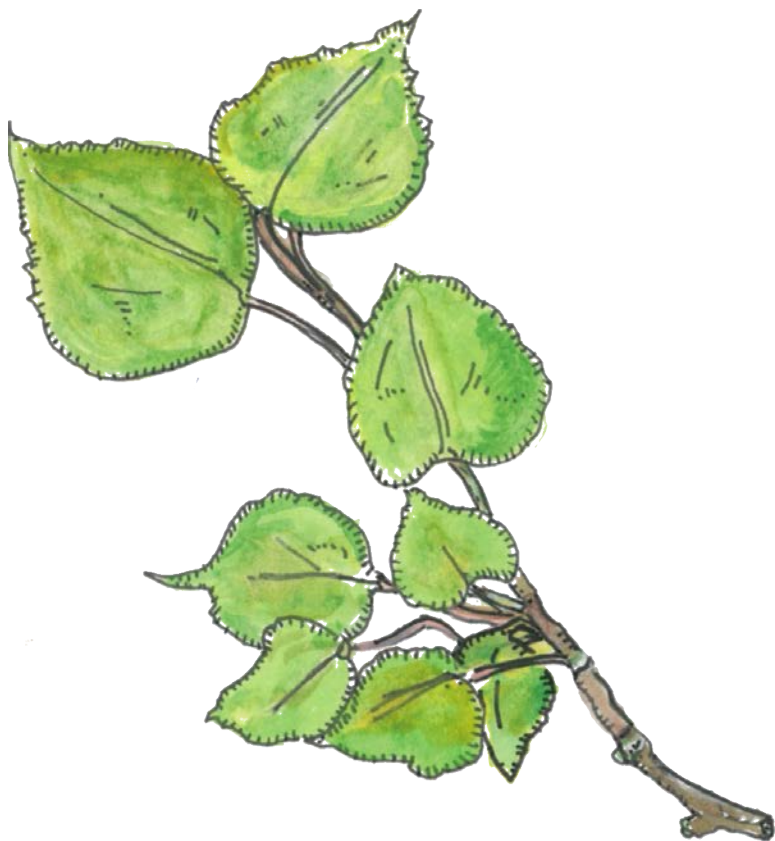
Birch (*Betula spp.*)

Birches are nice-looking trees more common to other places in the United States. In natural areas around Cleveland, I don't see birches often with the exception of the ledges trail in Cuyahoga Valley. There, scratch and lick a twig of a birch and you will enjoy a pleasant wintergreen flavor. Some birch species (yellow and black) were previous sources for wintergreen flavoring. In Cleveland, birches are often found in landscaped areas such as the parking lot entrance of the Ohio City MetroHealth location and by MetroHealth main campus's old entrance.



Linden (*Tilia spp.*)

Linden is a beloved tree in Europe, especially in Germany. Associated with fairy tales and romance, lindens are close to many hearts (Drori, 2022). The tree can be used for medicinal purposes and linden tea, made from the flowers, has a mild sedative effect. Lindens are commonly planted in Cleveland parks and cemeteries (such as Monroe). They can be found here at MetroHealth by the emergency entrance and by Via Sana (on Scranton Road).



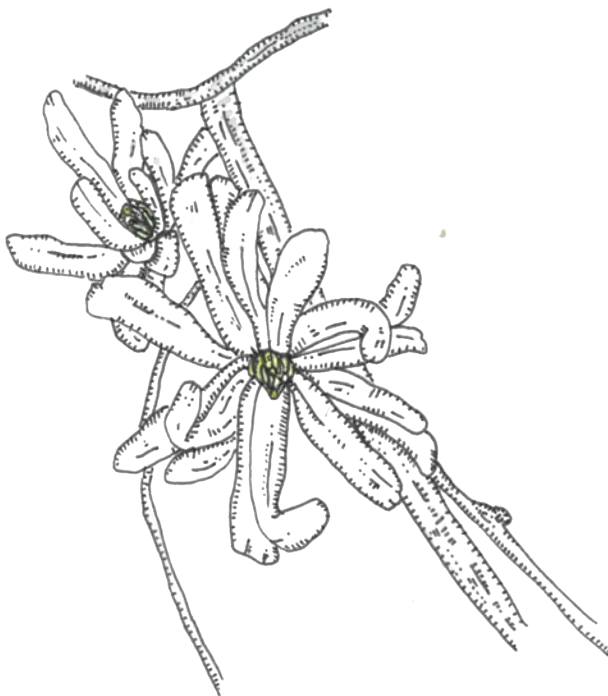
Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*; *Gleditsia triacanthos*)

Locusts have lovely white fragrant blossoms in May. In Cleveland, locusts are common trees and can be seen in parks, cemeteries, and as street trees. At MetroHealth, there are some gorgeous locusts at the corner of Scranton Road and MetroHealth Drive.



Magnolia (*Magnolia spp.*)

Magnolias are so beautiful I can't believe it sometimes. They bloom early in spring. A genus that generally prefers the southern United States, at least two ornamental types, the star magnolia and pink magnolia, can be seen throughout Cleveland. There is a gorgeous row of magnolias in Erie Street Cemetery. Tulip poplars, native to Cleveland, are in the Magnolia family and you can tell if you see their orange and green tie dye flowers on the forest floor. At MetroHealth, there is a magnolia, hidden almost, in a corner of the Rammelkamp building on Scranton Road.



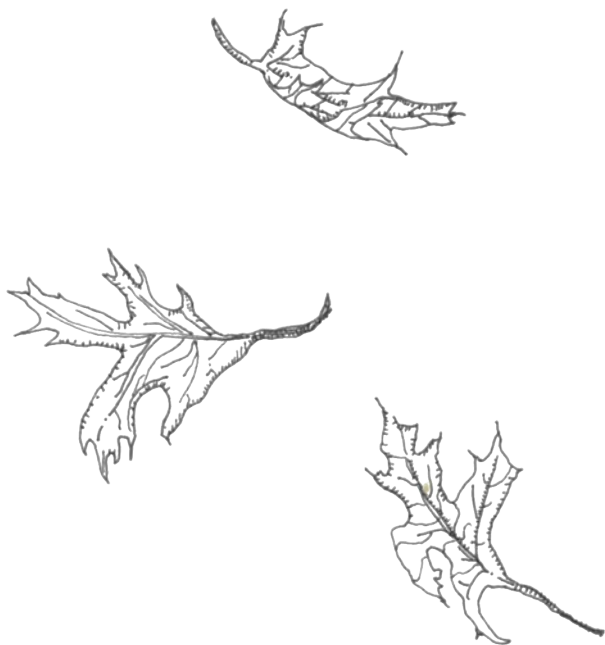
Maple (*Acer spp.*)

In the city, I've seen people collect sap from the red maples in Monroe Cemetery to make syrup. Sugar maples are less common in the city than box elder, red, Norway, Japanese, and silver maples. Red maples are a long-lived, well-formed native tree that can be found as a landscape tree or street tree. Norway maples, silver maples, and box elders are often growing up in lots or along fences. At MetroHealth there are maple trees planted near the emergency department and in Quad Park.



Oak (*Quercus spp.*)

Oak tree acorns are full of tannins. Tannins preserve acorns which is what makes them a great food staple for animals and people alike. In order for people to eat acorns, the acorns must be soaked or boiled with multiple water changes. Oaks can be divided into two general categories: red and white. Red oaks have a greater amount of tannins than white oaks and, while this makes them more bitter and require more washes for processing, it also makes them better for storage. Squirrels will eat white oak acorns first and save red oak acorns for later in the winter. Oak trees, like maples, are long-lived species that can be found in parks. Here at MetroHealth there are red and white oak trees in Quad Park.



Serviceberry (*Amelanchier* spp.)

The serviceberry is a pretty, small tree or large shrub with edible berries. The berries look and taste like blueberries. Birds and other wildlife also love the fruits. Serviceberries are native to Northeast Ohio. One of the first to flower in the spring, once you learn to recognize these trees, you'll see them everywhere. In Cleveland, they can be found at Steelyard (Aldi parking lot) and on the campus of Saint Ignatius High School. At MetroHealth, there is a serviceberry by the emergency department entrance on Scranton Road.



Yew (*Taxus baccata*)

Long lived and planted in cemeteries as a symbol of immortality, yews are not native, but they are popular in Cleveland for landscaping, especially as privacy hedges since they are conifers and do not lose their leaves. Almost all parts of the yew are poisonous. The only exception is the red aril, but you have to be sure to spit out the poisonous seed. I've tried one before. It is good, but not worth the stress of collecting and avoiding other parts of such a poisonous plant. At MetroHealth, yews are located at the corner of Scranton Road and MetroHealth Drive.



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This book is dedicated to my family and to plants, and everyone else, in the city.

The success of this project will be measured by visitation and clicks to the Glick Center Visitor Guide section of MetroHealth's website, so if you enjoyed this book, please visit the QR code below and click on the Main Campus Green Space tab. A PDF version of this book is also available to download.

