

For Tree Tips column on March 26, 2004
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The Right Tree for the Right Place

Welcome to the first Tree Tips column for the 2004 year growing season. With the spring garden and nursery catalogs having arrived in the mail, we have had several calls into the office with people asking about trees they have seen advertised and wondering what tree to plant.

If you are planning to add a tree (or more) to your landscape this spring, good for you! Tree selection can be a very important investment decision for a home owner. Considering most trees can the potential to outlive the people who plant them, the impact of this decision is one that will be lived with for a lifetime.

Choose a tree that is “hardy”: One of the primary limiting factor for trees that can be grown here on the plains is winter hardiness. The lowest temperature of the year and cold drying winds will limit the range of many trees. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has developed a hardiness zone map. In northeast Nebraska, trees rated for zone 4 or colder (smaller numbers) will be most “hardy” for this area. Check with the nursery or the tag on the tree to see what hardiness zone the tree is rated.

Consider tree function: Properly placed and located shade and ornamental trees increase the value of the real estate. Locating evergreens like spruces, firs and pines to the north and northwest of the home reduces heating costs in the winter. Planting shade trees like oaks, lindens, maples, ashes and hackberry on the south and west sides of the home reduces cooling costs. Trees located between a home and the street or road provide a screen and buffer from noise, dust and pollutants. Fruit and nut producing trees like ornamental crabapples, hawthornes and oaks attract wildlife. Flowering trees like redbud, Japanese tree lilac, disease resistant ornamental crabapples and horsechestnut provide for colors and texture differences and improve the beauty of the landscape.

Plan for the mature size: Remember to plan for how large the tree will grow. A common mistake people make when planting a young tree seedling is to place the tree too close to the home, garage, or other trees. Most trees will have a mature crown width at least one half the height of the tree. Consider the mature size of the tree and plant according to those dimensions. One to two properly placed large growing trees can shade and protect a complete side of a average sized home. It is recommended to stay 25 to 35 feet away from the building when planting large growing trees. Smaller growing trees can be grouped together.

Evaluate the site conditions: Site limitations may be due to soil restrictions (i.e. wet, clayey, compaction or high pH), light requirements, protection from exposure and moisture needs. Trees have different capabilities of adapting to the different site conditions. Selecting trees that can grow well in the site conditions that are present will result in a healthier tree and less maintenance as the tree grows. Check to see what growing conditions are recommended for the tree before trying to plant it on a site that will cause it to struggle.

Selecting the right tree for the right place will help ensure a healthy, useful and desired tree that will provide multiple benefits for the home and neighborhood for many years.