

For Tree Tips column on May 7, 2004
by Steve Rasmussen, Nebraska Forest Service District Forester

Great Plants for the Great Plains

The Great Plants for the Great Plains program was established in 1998 by the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum (NSA). This outreach program was created to promote those great plants that add the most with the least maintenance for landscapes here on the Great Plains. Each year a committee meets to select a special tree, shrub, perennial flower and a grass to promote for use in our landscapes. Different plants are evaluated and compared before one from each category is selected. Hardiness, disease and insect resistance, durability, attractiveness / uniqueness, and “growability” are some of the characteristics considered and compared. Winners do not have to be native to the Plains, just able to perform well in landscape settings.

Since we have limited space in the Tree Tips column and since this column focuses on trees, I will only list those trees that have been chosen under the tree category for each year:

2004 - Bur oak, *Quercus macrocarpa*. This tree is native throughout the Great Plains and can reach a 50 to 60 foot height and 45 to 50 foot width. Large dark green leaves turn yellow to brown in the fall. The acorns are an excellent food source for wildlife.

2003 - Concolor fir, *Abies concolor*. This tree is native to Colorado and west to California and can reach a 40 to 50 foot height and 15 to 30 foot width. Needles are 1 ½ inches long and flat. This tree is a good substitute for spruces.

2002 - Kentucky coffeetree, *Gymnocladus dioica*. This tree is native to eastern Nebraska and has large compound leaves. Mature trees reach 35 to 50 feet tall and 30 to 45 feet wide. The male trees produce five inch, squat pods that persist on the tree through the winter.

2001 - Baldcypress, *Taxodium distichum*. This tree is native from Missouri east into Florida. It is a deciduous evergreen that sheds its needles in the fall. In eastern Nebraska with moist soils, this tree can reach a 30 to 50 feet height and 20 to 25 foot width.

2000 - Pagoda dogwood, *Cornus alternifolia*. This small tree is native from Minnesota south to Georgia and grows to about a 20 to 25 foot height and 20 to 25 foot width. Flowers bloom in late May to early June.

1999 - Swamp white oak, *Quercus bicolor*. This oak is found native from Michigan to Arkansas and east. It will grow to 40 to 50 feet tall and 30 to 40 feet wide. Though it prefers moist and wet sites, it does have good drought tolerance.

1998 - Serviceberry, *Amelanchier x grandiflora*. This understory tree grows to 20 feet tall with variable width. It is native from north in Canada down into Iowa. It is known for its April flowers and persistent purplish fruit in the fall.

These trees are some of the best to try in your personal landscape where the space and arrangement allows. You can visit a local arboretum if you want to see growing specimens to get a better idea on what to expect. For more information about the Great Plants for the Great Plains and the other selected plants in that program, contact NSA at (402) 472-2971.