

Spring Planting Season: Select the Right Tree

Selection of trees for planting in a home landscape depends on the desired effect and the purpose the trees will satisfy in the landscape, explains Tchukki Andersen, staff arborist with the Tree Care Industry Association.

“Will they attract birds to the area?” she asks. “Shade a patio? Screen an unsightly view? Enhance the appearance of the home? Identify an entrance or exit? Trees should provide contrast and relief from surrounding buildings and create seasonal interest in areas near the home,” says Andersen.

TCIA advises homeowners to consider the following factors when selecting a tree:

- hardiness (ability of the plant to survive extremes of winter cold and summer heat)
- mature height and spread;
- growth rate;
- cleanliness;
- type of root system;
- moisture and fertilizer requirements;
- space available;
- maintenance requirements;
- availability;
- ornamental effects, such as branching habit, texture, and color of bark, flower, fruit and foliage; and whether the tree is evergreen or deciduous.

A professional tree care company can help you determine which tree species both performs well in your local area and is suited to your desired planting site. Arborists often do a close analysis of the specific planting site to determine the susceptibility or resistance to environmental conditions, such as:

- disease and insect problems that may limit your selections,
- the prior use of the planting site,
- soil conditions, such as poor drainage, and high or low pH,
- the presence or absence of channelized winds,
- the location of utilities, both above and below ground, because they are site conditions that dictate plant choice and location, and
- the relationship of the plant to roads, walkways and security lighting.

Is there enough space to plant a tree?

The space available at the specific site and mature tree size are important considerations and addressing these limits will go a long way toward reducing maintenance costs. Do not plant trees that will grow 25 feet or taller under or near overhead power lines. Do not forget the underground utilities. Out-of-sight does not mean that they would not have to be serviced at some point. Permanent plantings such as trees should be spaced to allow utility service. Ground-level utility structures such as transformers and individual service connections require space to be serviced. A minimum of 10 feet clearance after the tree has grown to maturity will help avoid any possible electrical hazards.

Where to plant

Community ordinances may restrict planting of trees near power lines, parking strips, street lights, sewers, traffic control signs and signals, sidewalks and property lines. Municipalities may require planting permits for trees planted on city property. City codes often require that trees on city property be maintained by the city, so citizens planting an improper selection can cause problems for themselves and the municipality.

What can you do?

Homeowners who would like a professional arborist to assess their trees should contact the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), a public and professional resource on trees and arboriculture that was established in 1938. It has more than 2,000 member companies who recognize stringent safety and performance standards, and are required to carry liability insurance. TCIA also has an Accreditation program that requires companies to meet industry standards and qualifications, including ANSI A300 pruning standards. An easy way to find a professional tree care service provider in your area is to use TCIA’s “Locate a member company program.” You can use this service by calling 1-800-733-2622 or by doing a ZIP code search at: www.treecaretips.org.

Editors: If you would like additional information or digital photos, please contact editor@tcia.org.