

Landscape Plant Selection: The Right Tree in the Right Place

The factors that determine a tree's success are numerous, and many aspects must be considered when planting trees. Planting a tree is more or less permanent so careful consideration needs to be taken when selecting and placing a tree. An ill placed and selected tree can cause a multitude of problems. On the other hand, a correctly chosen tree with the right site can offer years of enjoyment.

The existing site conditions dictate what tree species will work with the current environmental factors. Hardiness zones (Fayetteville is in zone 6b), soil types, annual rainfall, light availability, and pests all effect where a tree can be located. The local pests and annual rainfall can be obtained from a knowledgeable nurseryman. More site specific details such as light and soil type need to be taken into consideration as well.

Once the site characteristics are known, tree selection can begin. Native species are very suitable for landscape material because they have been in the area for thousands of years and are adapted to the regions climatic and geologic conditions. Sometimes due to certain site constraints or conditions and when following a certain architectural design theme ornamental introduced species need to be used. All trees have certain traits like form or shape, size, color, and texture. These features of trees can be used as accents that aesthetically improve property or function as shade or a screen.

For instance, evergreens are best for Northwest corners of structures to protect from cold winter winds, while deciduous trees are best on South and Southwest facing walls of buildings to shade intense summer sun. The wonderful thing about trees is that they can moderate weather and at the same time bring beautiful fall color and spring flowering or screen unwanted views.

The most overlooked element in tree selection is the mature size of a specimen. An example is planting large specimens near or under power lines that result in space conflicts as the tree matures. Always be knowledgeable about the final size of the plant material to be installed.

Determine the purpose of the plant:

- Does the site need shade?
- Is there something to be screened?
- Is color desired in the landscape?
- Is attracting wildlife important?

Consider the existing factors of the site:

- Are there sidewalks or driveways nearby?
- Are there overhead lines?
- What type of soil is in the planting location?
- Is the site near the house?
- Which side of the house is the planting site located?
- Are there underground utilities nearby?

Consider the growth characteristics of the tree:

- How much space does the tree require?
- Do the branches hang down or grow upright?
- Is it a tall, medium, or short tree at maturity?
- How wide does the canopy get?