



Wonderful Shade Trees

Joan Kobetz, Frederick Co Master Gardener

The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago. The second best time is now.

Hot, summer sun drives us to seek the shade of a tree. Not those lovely little ornamental trees that bloom in the spring, I'm talking about the really big trees, the ones that stand taller than a house. Sadly, most new housing developments do not have this priceless luxury.

Large shade trees provide us so much more than just welcome relief from the sun. They help to keep our houses cool in summer, saving on energy costs. They provide homes and food for birds, animals and insects. Their fallen leaves nourish the soil and their roots help reduce water run-off. Their leaves absorb carbon dioxide and other pollutants from the air and give off oxygen, thus reducing our carbon footprint. A typical tree will extract over 50 pounds of non-CO₂ pollution in its lifetime. They're the ultimate in putting the 'green' back in our yards, environment and wallet.

The loss of the natural tree canopy in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed region has contributed greatly to the degradation of the Chesapeake Bay. As homeowners, we can help to reduce this decline by planting shade trees in our yards. Not only will we benefit the environment, but we will also add value to our homes.

Because they are the largest building blocks in our gardens, great care should be taken when selecting and planting trees for our yards. Properly sited trees will outlive us, becoming a gift for future generations. They should be given room to grow and not planted too close to buildings, utility lines or the site of future excavations. One should also choose disease and problem resistant trees that are well-suited to growing in our region.

Planting on the east and west side of homes will provide the most benefit, ideally, at least twenty feet from a structure. A tree with a wide crown will provide the most shade.

Nearly all our large native trees are suitable for shading our yards. The beech is slow growing but it will get huge and last hundreds of years. Our native red and sugar maples are both excellent trees that provide spectacular fall color and dense shade. The silver maple is weak-wooded and not as desirable near structures. The Red, White and Willow oaks are all great shade trees, especially if nuts and squirrels are to be desired. More excellent nut trees include the walnuts and hickories, although these transplant best when very young.

Other good native trees include the Ash, River Birch, Sycamore, Hackberry, Tulip Poplar, Sweet Gum and Black Gum. Some excellent non-native trees are the Zelkova, Littleleaf Linden, and GoldenRain tree.

Several non-native tree species have been introduced to the region and have become invasive pests, destroying the natural balance of our ecology. The following tree species should not be planted: Tree of Heaven, Bradford Pear, Norway Maple, Princess Tree, Paper and White Mulberry and the Silk or Mimosa Tree.

And yes, you can plant a tree right now, in the middle of the summer. Just as long as you make sure to give it buckets of water several times a week for the first two months, or until it starts raining again and the weather cools.

Take some inspiration from Woody Allen who said, “Of all the wonders of nature, a tree in summer is perhaps the most remarkable; with the possible exception of a moose singing “Embraceable You” in spats.”

What wonders will you be inspired to plant?

For more information about horticulture or the Master Gardener Program in Frederick County, call the Frederick County Office of the University of Maryland Extension, (301) 600-1596, or visit <http://www.frederick.umd.edu/>. Our mission is to educate Maryland residents about safe, effective and sustainable horticultural practices that build healthy gardens, landscapes and communities.



"Planted on the west side of the deck twelve years ago, this Zelkova provides welcome afternoon shade for the author."