

Selecting trees for the landscape

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office

As I think about the subject of this week's column, I recall a story about two neighbors.

A young father was raking leaves in his yard when he noticed his elderly neighbor digging a planting hole for his newly purchased tree.

When asked what he was doing, the elderly gentleman said he was planting a tree.

The young neighbor just smiled and chuckled to himself as he asked, "Why are you doing that? That tree won't be fully grown for 20 or 30 years, and you'll probably never benefit from it."

So, the elderly gentleman told his neighbor, "I know that, but aren't you glad that someone planted that tree in your front yard years ago so that you could enjoy its shade and so your kids can climb its stately limbs?"

A sobering perspective, indeed.

Hurricane Ike caused us to better value the worth of trees in the landscape — in terms of dollars as well as aesthetics. The unusually hot weather last year increased our appreciation of shade under a tree.

So, when is the best time to plant landscape trees in our Upper Gulf Coast region? Right now. Winter planting allows newly planted trees time to become better estab-



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson

If you plan on adding a tree to your home landscape, doing so during the cool temperatures of winter is the ideal time. Your new tree will perform better and you'll appreciate your efforts and wisdom during the hot summers.

lished before spring growth and the heat of summer.

The winter season provides the benefits of ample moisture and coolness to promote plant performance during the upcoming growing season.

Unfortunately, the ideal landscape tree does not exist. Trees which have desirable features likely will have some features that are not so desirable.

A tree might have beautiful flowers in the spring only to be followed by undesirable fruit or seedpods in the fall.

The homeowner must carefully select the best tree to fit his or her particular landscape needs and situation. In making a final selection, it is important the home-owner fully understand the tree's charac-

teristics, growing habits, requirements and its desirable and not-so-desirable qualities.

Choose a tree that offers the best characteristics and the least undesirable features to fit your landscape needs.

Study your landscape carefully to best determine the landscape needs. Determine where the tree is needed and for what purposes.

Know how much growing room is available as well as existing conditions such as walks, driveways, overhead lines, water lines, drainage and the overall effect the new tree or trees will have on existing plantings in the landscape.

Consider if you prefer an evergreen or deciduous tree. The deciduous tree will provide



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shade in the summer and welcomed sun in winter. The pecan tree is an excellent example.

In contrast, evergreens usually provide dense shade year-round and might not offer the interest of seasonal change such as fall color, new leaf buds in spring or bare branches in winter.

If the tree is desired for screening, perhaps an evergreen choice is best, as it will provide a permanent year-round screen.

Your nurseryman will offer you the choice of small trees, those that grow no higher than 35 feet, and large trees, those that, with age grow 60 to 80 feet or more in height.

Small trees usually grow fast to provide quick shade and offer a greater choice of seasonal bloom, fall leaf color and landscape interest. They also require less growing room and can be planted in groups or masses.

Large trees with time provide more shade yet demand a greater growth space. Perhaps the best solution would be a combination of large and small trees — the small trees for quick shade and seasonal interest, while the larger trees mature to size.

Small- to medium-size tree selections for our area include redbud, hollies, yaupon, crape myrtle, cherry laurel, southern wax myrtle, river birch, Chinese pistachio, golden rain tree and others.

Commonly planted large trees include green ash, white ash, lacebark or Drake elm, red maple, pecan, southern magnolia, sweet gum and several types of oaks.

A tree choice is a personal choice to fit a personal landscape need. Trees provide a natural beauty, unmatched by any creation of man, yet each tree has its own good and bad qualities in terms of use in the home landscape.

When selecting the best tree for the landscape, choose a tree that will tolerate the local weather extremes of heat and cold and one which is adaptable to local soils.

Observe the quality of landscape trees growing in your neighborhood. For example, while pine trees do not perform well in many areas of the county, they do well in certain areas of Dickinson, Friendswood, etc.

If you plan on adding a tree to your home landscape, doing so during the cool temperatures of winter is the ideal time.

Your new tree will perform better and you'll appreciate your efforts and wisdom during our long, hot summers.

To obtain several free publications that can be of assistance on selecting, planting and caring for shade trees, visit the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office, 4102 Main Street in La Marque.

