

Frequently Asked Questions

- Tree Stewardship -



What are the best trees for shade?

What are the best trees for avoiding conflicts with power lines?

What are the best trees for wildlife?

What are the best street trees?

What is the best size tree to buy for my yard?

Where is the best place to plant trees in my yard?

What are the best trees for shade?

Trees with large, wide crowns are best to provide shade during hotter months. However, it's important to remember that trees are planted for the future. A bur oak planted today won't provide much shade for your house until a new generation moves in. That said, some trees grow faster than others. A silver maple or honey locust will provide a mature canopy long before an oak, but they present different drawbacks, such as a less dense canopy or a tendency to drop big limbs.

What are the best trees for avoiding conflicts with power lines?

Choose trees that grow to less than 25' tall. Good options are serviceberry, flowering dogwood, redbud, several types of hawthorn, and flowering crabapple.

What are the best trees for wildlife?

Native trees and shrubs are by far the best for supporting the food web, and a healthy food web is what attracts the most wildlife. Maples, honey locusts, and serviceberries are great for pollinators. Oaks play host to hundreds of different insects, like butterflies, whose caterpillars are important to many bird species. Berry producing trees like hackberry and mulberry are important food sources for birds, as well. Mast producing trees like hickory, oak, and walnut are crucial for a range of species, including squirrels and deer.

What are the best street trees?

Various factors and environmental conditions should be considered when choosing a tree for any location. Street trees in particular must be able to tolerate road salts, hotter than normal temperatures due to the proximity of the road, increased airborne pollutants, a smaller area for their roots, and more. Check out this useful guide in order to make an informed decision.

What is the best size tree to buy for my yard?

There are two questions here: how big of a tree should I plant and how big will the tree get? The first question is the easiest to answer. Smaller caliper trees—1-1.25" in diameter—are easier to establish and grow more quickly, often catching up with larger trees transplanted at the same time, which take longer to establish. It's tempting to get as big of a tree as possible, but you're better off being patient and getting a younger tree.

No matter how big of a tree you plant, you should consider how large it will be at maturity. Make sure the tree has room to spread its roots and branches without threatening or damaging

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structures, foundations, utilities like sewer and water lines, and power lines. For example, a red maple can get between 30'-50' wide. That means you will want the trunk about 20' from your house. At the same time, you have to be sure you aren't locating it near your sewer line, because the vigorous roots of maple trees can damage the pipes.

Where is the best place to plant trees in my yard?

Aside from the issues noted above, there are a few additional factors to consider in order to find the best location for your trees. Locate deciduous trees on the south and west sides of your house to create shade during the hottest times of the day in growing season. In the winter, the bare limbs will allow the sun to shine through and create a little passive heating for your home.

You can plant evergreen trees as a winter wind break in the west, north, and northeast to help reduce heating costs. A few things to keep in mind:

- Avoid formal, straight lines. They don't block wind as well as staggered rows or naturalized clusters, and the aesthetic is marred when even a single tree dies. This publication from Penn State University provides some helpful tips for planting a screen
- For maximum protection, plant your windbreak two to five times the mature height of the trees away from your house.

Different municipalities have different zoning requirements for the distance of trees and other plantings to roads and sidewalks. Check on these before deciding on a final location.

You will also want to consider environmental conditions: the soil type, drainage capacity, and pH where you want to plant are all important. Also, make sure the spot you want to plant receives enough water and light for the species you are planting.

Finally, call 811 and have utilities marked before you do any digging.