



Extension

COLORADO MASTER GARDENERSM

Year Round Gardening

Tree Selection

By Fredricka Bogardus, Colorado Master Gardener

March and April is a good time to start thinking about adding some trees to your garden. Trees are an investment which if done well, will add value and beauty to your landscape for decades to come. Trees provide shade, shelter for birds, sometimes spectacular spring blooms, fruit, and good fall color. There are several factors to consider when selecting a tree.

Scale is probably the most important factor. Scale is about right sizing a tree. Large trees can exceed 50', small trees may reach maturity at 20'. Like Goldilocks you need to find the size that is 'just right' for your garden. About 15 years ago, I planted an Austrian pine in an enclosed space. While planting, my husband expressed a concern that the tree might grow too large for the space. I laughed off his concern saying "we'll be long gone before that." Wrong answer, ten years later we were cutting a healthy pine tree down because it had outgrown the space. It broke my heart, and was a costly lesson to learn, but it had to go. Pay careful attention to mature size. It really matters.

If you are considering a flowering tree, you need to simultaneously think about fruit. Flowering trees can produce fruit that make a major mess in your landscape, are you willing to do the clean up every year? There are also varieties that produce no visible fruit. Other varieties produce fruit that politely stay on the tree through the winter (persistent fruit), providing a food source for birds and little to clean up. There is no right or wrong on the type of tree you choose, just make sure you know what you are getting.

The best insurance for getting the tree you will love is to do the research before you shop. If possible, have a few specific trees in mind as you may not find every tree you desire at local garden centers. If you cannot find any of your choices ask the nurseryman if he can special order a tree for you. Purchase the biggest tree your budget and planting options will allow. Make sure it is planted properly and watered well until established.

The following are a few suggestions to get you started:

Blue Totem Spruce (*Picea pungens* 'Blue Totem') If you want a blue spruce, but don't have space for a really big tree this cultivar is for you. It reaches only 15-20' tall and stays a skinny 3-5' wide. The blue color is great.

White fir (*Abies concolor*) This evergreen tree is big, mature height is 30 to 50', up to 20' wide. It has beautiful silvery green needles that are soft to the touch. Make sure you have plenty of space for this tree.

Washington hawthorn (*Crataegus phaenopyrum*) This is a small, deciduous tree. It reaches about 20' in height and width. White flowers are followed by fruit that redden as the summer goes on. The fruit are persistent through winter. This tree is thorny, but I think the persistent fruit and red fall color makes up for the thorns. If the thorns are deal killer for you consider the Cockspur thornless hawthorne (*Crataegus crus-galli* var. *inermis*.)



Hackberry (*Celcis occidentalis*) This is a big, deciduous tree, growing up to 50' in height with a crown diameter of up to 30'. Give this a lot of room. It is noted as a shade tree, it will require pruning in the early years, it's growth habit is somewhat unruly, but if you want a fast growing, big tree this is a good choice.

If you have lawn and garden questions, go to ask.extension.org for answers. To learn what events are coming up at the CSU Extension office in El Paso County, visit <http://elpasoco.colostate.edu/index.shtml>

More tree information

Colorado Tree Coalition Find the Right Tree <http://coloradotrees.org/find/>

CMG Garden Note #633 The science of planting trees
<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/mg/Gardennotes/633.pdf>

CMG Garden Note #635 Care of recently planted trees
<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/mg/Gardennotes/635.pdf>