



MASTER GARDENER

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Buyer Beware When Shopping for Landscape Plants

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Soon we will start to shop for new plants, replacement plants and annuals. There are lots of local garden centers and most have great variety. Before we purchase we need to know that the plants will do well in our area. There is no guarantee that garden centers stock plants “designed” for Colorado. My recommendation – do your research and then purchase. This might mean selecting the individual plants, doing the research and then making a second trip to the garden center to purchase your selections.



Unfortunately, I do not always follow my own advice. Recently, I purchased a corkscrew rush (*Juncus effusus* 'Spiralis'). It was in the ornamental grass section of the garden center. The plant looked healthy and was interesting with spiraling, unruly foliage. The plant tag that was included with the plant indicated water usage would be “low, once established.” The plant has survived, but it does not thrive. At some later time, I looked for information about this plant. When looking for information, I use only .edu, .org, .gov sites. Per the Missouri Botanical Garden (<http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org>), these “plants are typically not grown as garden plants. They may be grown at the edge of a pond or water garden, in boggy areas, among wet pebbles or rocks or in several inches of standing water.” Had I done my research prior to purchase, I would not have made the purchase. A second mistake was a bit more costly. I purchased a tree that is not suited for our area – a corkbark fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*).

The tree was properly planted and maintained. It did not thrive and in year number three began to quickly turn brown. The problem was my soil. This particular tree will not do well in alkaline soils. There is an excellent site that provides good details for those looking to add trees to their landscapes – Front Range

Tree Recommendation List -

<https://extension.colostate.edu/docs/pubs/garden/treereclist.pdf>. In the future I will not purchase a tree until I have reviewed the Tree Recommendation List. The corkbark fir will be replaced with a Limber Pine (*Pinus flexilis*). This tree is given an "A" rating on the Recommendation List.

I am a fan of native plants. They thrive, are attractive, are not generally seen in most landscapes, and attract pollinators. The best reason for incorporating natives into your landscape is water conservation. The use of natives has been shown to reduce the amount of water needed to maintain a home landscape. If you think native plants might be of interest, you can peruse the Colorado Native Plant Society website for information - <https://conps.org/>. You might also search the internet for names of plant nurseries that offer native plants and then visit. I know there are several within an easy drive of Colorado Springs. I predict you will like the results and you will spend less time researching for appropriate landscape plants.

Starting April 15 Colorado Master Gardeners will be available to answer your questions at the extension office help desk. The address is 17 N Spruce Street, Colorado Springs. The desk will be staffed on Mondays and Wednesdays, from 9am to noon and 1pm to 4pm. Come visit us with your questions. Help desk volunteers can also be reached by phone at 719-520-7684, or at csumg2@elpasoco.com.