

What Kind of Tree Do I Want?

In school, children learn that planting a tree can help planet Earth. Planting a tree also can help the environment in your own backyard or community. Trees provide a multitude of benefits. They can reduce your heating and cooling costs, help clean the air, add beauty and color, provide shelter from the wind and sun, and be home to many different types of wildlife.

Once you decide to plant a tree, do you know what kind of tree you want? Here are some tips to help you decide.

One of the first steps is to decide what you want the tree to do for you. Do you want to attract wildlife? Are you concerned about shade or a windbreak for your home? Do you want to enjoy tree-ripened fruit? Are you willing to clean up after the fallen fruit or do you prefer a less messy tree?

Consider how the tree you purchase will fit into your overall landscape. Then, look closely at the area where you will put the tree. There may be other elements in your yard to consider. Perhaps you have a grand old sycamore tree that a shade loving redbud could grow near. Do you have room for a tree, such as the hackberry, that grows to 100 feet tall?

Plant only low-growing trees under power lines to prevent future hazards and bad pruning jobs

Look at the soil conditions. If you have a wet area, trees that do not mind getting their roots wet, such as willows, are a good choice.

Look at the trees in your neighborhood, too. Planting too many of the same tree species may lead to trouble. Many people still remember the devastation seen when Dutch elm disease struck in many American towns. So many of the statuesque trees lined the boulevards that when the diseased trees were cut down in an attempt to save others, trees became scarce. Diversity in a community will promote good tree health and be more visually pleasing.

Consider planting tree species that are native to your area. They generally will live longer and require less care than introduced tree species.

Find out if there are tree ordinances in your community. Some tree species are considered nuisances. Some may require a permit prior to planting. And, there may be regulations regarding the species of trees that can be planted in community areas such as parking lots.

The most important thing is--do your part to help planet Earth in your corner of the world. Plant a tree in your backyard.

For more information on tree planting and other Backyard Conservation practices, visit the Natural Resources Conservation Service online at www.nrcs.usda.gov. Or call 1-888-LANDCARE (toll free) for a free colorful Backyard Conservation booklet and tip sheets.