



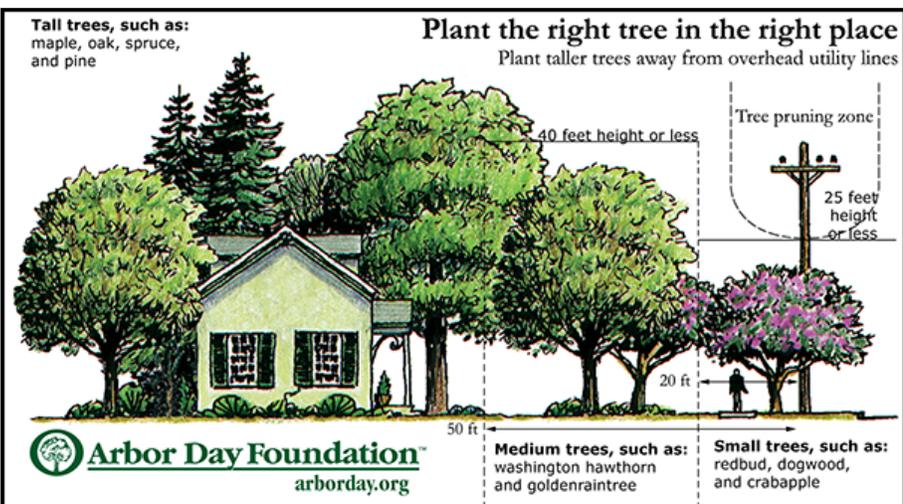
Choosing and Caring for the Right Trees

by Kent County Master Gardener Kathy Doyle

Are you ready to add some trees to your landscape? This article explains what kinds of trees are most beneficial for the local ecosystem, how to decide which tree might be best for you, and how to plant your new tree.

Almost any tree is better than no tree, but there are trees to avoid and trees that are exceptional. Trees to avoid include the Tree of Heaven, Bradford Pear and Norway Maple - all of which can be destructive to the environment. For example, the deceptively named "Tree of Heaven" is invasive, spreads aggressively, and is the preferred host plant to the Spotted Lanternfly - a pest that feeds on and destroys fruit trees. For a list of both recommended trees and trees to avoid, see <https://delawaretrees.com/publications/recommended-trees/>

Native trees are trees best suited for a particular region, and within the world of native trees, there are - as Dr. Douglas Tallamy from the University of Delaware calls them - "keystone" trees. A keystone tree not only adds beauty to your property, but also provides critical habitat for beneficial insects and birds. Examples of keystone trees include native oaks, native cherries, and native willows.



Arbor Day Foundation photo

Native birds and insects need native plants. Birds and beneficial insects native to the Mid-Atlantic have declined precipitously over the past several decades, coinciding with increased development, a

Plant a Native Tree for the Environment

One of the most effective actions an individual can do for the environment is to plant native trees, bushes, and plants. Before you waste your time and money, be able to answer the following questions:

1. What plant hardiness zone do you live in?
 - Plant a tree suitable for your climate. Delaware lies in zone 7, elsewhere, you can easily search the internet for "Plant Hardiness Zone".
2. Where do you want to plant your tree and how tall and wide will it grow?
 - Small flowering trees, such as cherry and redbud, do well in small spaces. Large spaces welcome oaks.
3. What kind of soil do you have and is it healthy?
 - Sussex County tends to have sandy soil, while Kent and New Castle Counties have high clay content. A soil test will be able to evaluate soil fertility, nutrient deficiencies, and pH levels. Some trees do better in slightly more acidic soil, while others prefer soil that is alkaline. For information on soil tests, search for Delaware's soil testing program or call 302 831 1392.
4. How much sun does your location get?
 - People tend to overestimate how much sun an area gets. Full sun areas receive six or more hours per day, while full shade receives less than three hours usually morning light.

preoccupation with manicured lawns, and increased uses of pesticides which kill beneficial as well as harmful insects.

Once you have completed your research, it is time to purchase your tree. Call various nurseries. Look at the tree carefully to make sure it is healthy. Do not be afraid to ask the vendor if you can see the roots. If the roots are tightly wound (girdled), select a different one. Carry it by the root ball or the container - not the trunk. If it is a large tree, you can tip it and roll it along the edge of the root package. For larger trees, consider hiring a professional landscaper to transport and plant the tree. One benefit to this approach is that a landscaping company will often warranty the tree for one year and replace it if it does not thrive - as long as you have been giving it the proper care.

Your tree should come with planting instructions for best location, proper depth and width. First, plant at the right depth. Too shallow will dry out the roots, too deep will rot out the trunk. The beginning of the root flare should be above ground. Second, make sure the hole is wide enough. If it is too narrow, the roots will be constrained. Third, return the soil to the hole, lightly tamping the soil to get rid of air pockets that might dry out the roots. Make sure the tree is standing straight.

Once the tree is firmly in the ground, create a slightly elevated ring of soil just beyond where the roots extend. This will create a pool for water so that the water doesn't just run off. Do a deep watering. Keep the soil and mulch moist, but not soggy. In general, you can give your tree a good watering every 7 to 10 days - more often during a heatwave.

The final step is to lay mulch. A simple formula to remember is 3:3:3; three inches high, three inches away from the trunk and at least three inches out. Do not let the mulch touch the trunk and do not make it too deep. Even landscapers make this mistake and create a big volcano up to the trunk. It should look more like a flat donut with a large center hole. The point of mulch is to keep the roots protected and moist. Too much mulch can prevent oxygen from reaching the roots. Watering too much can cause the same problem.

Trees take up to three years to establish, so be sure to water them regularly. Planting your tree in the fall will give it a good head start. People tend to be the most motivated to plant in the spring, but fall is a better time. The tree will be that much more established before the hot summer comes along.

Delaware Cooperative Extension



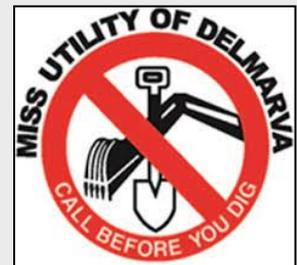
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A partial sun plant is more heat tolerant. Partial shade plants do well where there is shade in the afternoon.

5. Are you certain there are no hidden gas lines or other pipes and wires underground?

- Call Miss Utility at 811 before you do any digging. The various utilities will come out (for free) and will use different color markings to show where any



lines are located. Roots of a tree typically extend out as far as the canopy, so keep that in mind when determining where to place the tree.

Care for Your New Tree

You have put a lot of time and money into your new tree. Once it is planted, avoid construction activities near the root zone, and never nail or screw anything into it. With proper care, your tree will provide many years of enjoyment for humans, birds and insects.

For more information about Master Gardener workshops, garden helplines, presentations, becoming a Master Gardener Volunteer, or other activities, please visit these websites.

UD Website - <https://www.udel.edu/academics/colleges/canr/cooperative-extension/environmental-stewardship/master-gardeners/>

DSU Website- <https://cast.desu.edu/cooperative-extension/agriculture-natural-resources/delaware-master-gardeners>