

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



A Variety of Medium to Large Trees for the Landscape

A frequent question is “When is the best time of year to plant trees?” The best time to plant most trees and shrubs is in the fall, which goes into December. Before planting a tree, determine what is already growing in the area. The larger the number of trees within the same family, the more likely they may be attacked by insect pests or diseases.

Dr. William Fountain, retired Extension Professor, UK Department of Horticulture, suggests planting trees with minimal insect and disease problems that are not considered invasive. He also recommends selecting the best plant for the site, using a diversity of species, and installing healthy plants.

Amur maackia (*Maackia amurensis*) is a medium tree reaching 20 to 30 feet tall and wide. The bark becomes attractive with maturity as it peels. The dull white flowers are produced on 4- to 6-inch upright racemes in June and July. The 2- to 3-inch long fruit are brown. The fall color is dull. It requires well-drained soil in a sunny location. In addition, this tree is drought tolerant, especially once established.

MESSENGER-INQUIRER

Another tree to consider for the landscape is American hornbeam or musclewood (*Carpinus caroliniana*). It has interesting, smooth, gray bark that looks like flexed muscles. This slow-growing, medium-sized tree reaches 20 to 30 feet tall and wide. It can be found as a large shrub if not trained in the nursery to be a single trunk tree. Fall color varies from yellow to orange. It can tolerate wet sites but also grows in drier locations. Musclewood tolerates some shade.

A large tree for the spacious landscape is baldcypress (*Taxodium distichum*) which grows in wet and well-drained soil. The tree reaches 70 feet in height and 20 to 30 feet wide, forming a columnar shape. It can be grown with low hanging branches. The soft, feathery foliage turns brownish orange before dropping in the fall.

An early bloom tree is the Cornelian cherry dogwood (*Cornus mas*). It is a broad tree that reaches 15 to 25 feet tall with a spread of 15 to 20 feet. In March, small .75-inch, yellow flowers cover the tree. Bright red fruits are produced in summer. The grayish brown bark exfoliates on older branches. It prefers to grow in well-drained soil and can grow in partial shade to full sun.

A disease and insect free tree is ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*), which tolerates urban conditions. The key is to make sure to purchase a male cultivar. The fruits on the female tree have an offensive odor. It can take 8 to 20 years for the female tree to flower, so don't take a chance with an ungrafted seedling. Ginkgo is a large tree reaching 50 feet tall with a 30 to 40 foot spread in time. The rigid, upright branches give it a distinctive characteristic. The fan-shaped leaves turn a brilliant yellow in the fall. A unique characteristic is that most of the leaves

MESSENGER-INQUIRER

fall off the tree within 24 to 48 hours in autumn. It prefers to grow in well-drained soil and full sun.

Japanese zelkova, (*Zelkova serrata*) is an upright, vase shaped, large tree. It can grow 120 feet tall and spread 50 feet or more over time. Even though the branches seem crowded, the structure of the tree does not seem to be affected. The fall leaf color ranges from yellow to orange to maroon. It has been used as a street tree to replace elms killed by the Dutch elm disease. Zelkova prefers deep soil. It becomes drought tolerant once it is established.

Katsuratree (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*) is a large tree reaching from 40 to 60 feet in height with a spread of 30 feet. The leaf is heart-shaped. Sometimes it stays in a pyramidal shape as it grows, or it may spread out. The fall foliage color is yellow to soft orange.

A native tree of Kentucky is the sourwood (*Oxydendrum arboreum*). You may have seen this tree along the side of the road on I 165 going south. It can reach a height of 25 to 30 feet tall. The small, white flowers open in June and look like upside-down urns. These fragrant flowers hang from 8 to 10 inches long with slightly drooping stems. They persist as clusters of small, brown fruit until late winter. The foliage is shiny green all summer. Sourwood is considered to be one of the best trees with red fall color among the native trees. The bark is grayish brown to brown in color. This is a good tree for well-drained, slightly acidic soil.

Trees to use with caution, according to Dr. Fountain, include oaks (*Quercus*), maples (*Acer*), river birch (*Betula nigra*), flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*), and elms (*Ulmus*). These are already plentiful in the environment, and some have pest issues.

MESSENGER-INQUIRER

For more information about trees for the landscape, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tips:

The publications by Dr. William Fountain, which contain important notes to consider about replacing trees, titled, "Trees with Minimal Insect and Disease Problems for Kentucky Landscapes," HO-94, and "After Your Ash Has Died", ID 241 are available at the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service office or at

<http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/ho/ho94/ho94.pdf> and

<http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/ID/ID241/ID241.pdf>. Tables of problematic and overplanted tree species are included.

To find the suggested trees, contact local nurseries, garden centers, and landscape architects. A plant locator guide from KY wholesale producers is searchable at

<http://www.kyagr.com/marketing/plant/plant-guide.html>.

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