

Planting Trees
By Julie Silva

Drought conditions put a dead stop to planting trees right? Here is a consideration for you. Do you just pop into the nursery and grab a tree to fill a spot? In actuality, planting a tree, with a life span of decades, if not centuries, takes some important decision making. Trees are complex and need careful consideration regarding location, soil, water, room, and your expectations. If you are planting during fall, the prime planting season, now is the time to start gathering information and making decisions.

Expectations are probably the biggest hurdle. What will this tree do for you in its lifetime? Are you searching for color, shade, fruit, or esthetics? Here is a list of questions from the Arbor Day Foundation to guide you in your selection.

1. **Height.** How big will this tree get? Will it infringe on power lines, sewer lines, or solar panels?
2. **Canopy Spread.** How wide will the tree get? A yard may be overwhelmed by a massive spreading tree. Some trees will get so wide they block off your entire house.
3. **Is the tree deciduous or coniferous?** A deciduous tree loses its leaves in the fall/winter. A coniferous tree will shed mature leaves throughout the year.
4. **Form or Shape.** Tree varieties have different shapes. A columnar tree like an Italian cypress is very upright and takes a smaller footprint. Round and vase-like (v-shaped) provide the most shade. Tall, upright trees like coastal redwoods block winds as a windbreak.
5. **Growth Rate.** When will it reach the full height and width? Slow growers live longer.
6. **Soil, Sun, and Moisture.** Growing requirements are essential to proper location. Know your site and your tree will have the best success.
7. **Fruit.** Do you want fruit? Some trees, even though they are ornamental, produce fruit. Good examples are flowering purple plums, female mulberry, and crabapples.

After you have answered these questions it is time to really look at your site. Use a tape measure. Look for sidewalks, power lines, sewer lines, roof lines, and grumpy neighbors. Planting the right tree in the right place is the key. Small trees like red buds, dogwoods, and flowering plums should be at least 8-10 feet from the wall of a one story building. Pruning may affect the growth pattern of the canopy. Your red bud canopy could easily spread in width to cover lots of landscaping by forcing it to a shorter height. Choose your initial planting spot, take your tape measure and walk around the mature width of that tree. If the tree you chose has a 20

foot canopy it will reach out 10 feet from the trunk all the way around on each side, even over the fence, and covering the neighbor's pool. The drip line, or the edge of the branches, will extend that far at maturity. Remember the grumpy old neighbor? Your mature tree might impact his pool pump and many other things. It is better to foresee problems at the beginning.

Planting trees creates huge benefits for everyone in your community. They add to property values, keep our cities cooler, exchange carbon dioxide for oxygen, clean the air, provide us food, and give us an excellent spot to relax. Planting a tree is like creating history, making a vision for years to come.

Julie Silva is a University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener of Tuolumne County.