

# I Love Trees

By Jacqueline Bruhn



I love trees. I love the shade they provide for a hammock. I love hearing the whisper of the leaves as an afternoon breeze passes through. I love how trees gently remind us of the passing seasons. And I especially love big trees - oaks, liquidambar and redwoods.

We bought our home 8 years ago and there was not a single tree on our lot. The first tree I planted was a Jacaranda. I find the lacey foliage and wisteria-like purple flowers striking. I then purchased a weeping birch, paperbark maple, and kousa dogwood. I did some research but not as much as I should have.

The dogwood got too much sun and too little water in my front yard and eventually ended up in the green bin. The weeping birch was soon covered with ants milking aphids, each leaf a sticky mess. It wants much more water than I was willing to give it. It too was destined for the green bin. The paperbark maple, 5 years later, is finally starting to look better.

On my green thumb side, the Jacarandas (note the plural!) are thriving. The younger of the two bloomed about 6 months after planting. The slightly older backyard Jacaranda is starting to provide a lovely circle of shade in the late afternoon.

A tree in your garden adds a shelter and food for birds, squirrels and butterflies. It adds structure, form and vertical interest. Trees can add fruit and nuts to our diets. They also keep our home and patio cooler by providing shade on hot days. And a few years down the road, it may become a place for a child's tree house.

But how to decide? Here are some questions to consider. This list is not exhaustive, but it's a start to finding the right tree for your garden. This way you can keep your trees in the ground and out of your green bin.

1. Do you want a tree that is evergreen or one that drops leaves each year (deciduous)?
2. Do you want your tree to provide a screen from neighbors or will it simply be something to make your garden a more beautiful place?
3. How much water do you want to give your tree? Some trees, once established, need very little water. Others (dogwoods, birch, fruit trees) need supplemental water their entire lives. Most trees, even drought tolerant natives, will grow faster with water in their younger years.
4. Where will your tree be planted? Will it be in full sun? Part shade? How much wind will it get? How close is it to foundations, sidewalks and patios and are its roots known to seek out water? Are there power lines overhead?
5. How big a tree can you plant? Trees take both vertical and horizontal space. What sort of shade would a tree that is 15 feet wide and 20 feet tall cast in your yard? Are you willing to have that much shade in your yard?
6. Do you want fruit, flowers or nuts from your tree?

A great information source for trees online is “Select Tree” from CalPoly at <http://selecttree.calpoly.edu>. You can search for a tree that meets certain criteria or learn more about a species needs. Another great resource if you want your tree(s) to be fruit/nut bearing is the website <http://homeorchard.ucdavis.edu>. This covers all you need to know to be successful at planting fruit and nut trees. A favorite book for tree selection is Plants & Landscapes for Summer Dry Climates. Make sure to check out the charts in the back of the book. Talk to staff at local nurseries and take a walk in your neighborhood. Which trees stand out to you? Make sure you take note of the season. While I love my Jacaranda’s, many gardeners find their leaf drop in March very messy. If you see a tree you like, leave a note for the homeowner, and I am sure they’ll call you back. Winter is the perfect time to plant a tree so do your research and get digging.

General gardening information can be obtained by going to <http://acmg.ucdavis.edu/> or calling the hot lines: 925-960-9420 or 510-639-1371.