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Choose the right tree for your Sonoma County yard

By SONOMA COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

FOR THE PRESS DEMOCRAT



Cercis occidenntalis/Western Redbud

Question: I'm thinking about redoing my garden and might have a spot for a tree. Would this be a good choice for my garden?

Answer: Trees provide shade, habitat and food sources for a wide variety of birds and butterflies, and will be a beautiful focal point for your garden — plus so much more.

Trees enhance property values, absorb the sound of traffic and strengthen social connections in neighborhoods. As a member of the 'urban forest,' a tree sequesters and stores atmospheric carbon, buffers wind, controls erosion, provides habitat, decreases drought and reduces the heat island effect. Planting trees is the most efficient and inexpensive action we can take to combat climate change and they make

our environment a more desirable place to live, work and play. The tree will be the star of your garden!

Choosing the right tree

With so many attractive trees available, how do you choose the right one? The City of Santa Rosa and Master Gardeners created The Climate Forward Trees list, a recommended palette of 28 tree species that are likely to thrive in Sonoma County now and with the projected climate in the years 2050-2100. The list has many good choices for both urban gardens and larger properties.

Here we mention just a few of the trees. For the complete list, go to bit.ly/3McDCB2:

- Western Redbud (*Cercis occidentalis*): A Northern California native noted for deep pink spring blooms. As a small tree, the redbud is well suited for any size garden.
- Chinese Pistache (*Pistacia chinensis* 'Keith Davey'): A medium-sized tree that shows off its brilliant orange-red color in the fall.
- Crepe Myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*): Known for its spectacular summer bloom and fall color.
- Desert Willow (*Chilopsis linearis*): This less common California native has fragrant, showy flowers in spring and summer.

If you have a large property, an oak tree is a wonderful choice. Blue oak, black oak, valley oak and coast live oak are all California natives. Native oaks are habitat heroes. Not only do they supply food and shelter for hundreds of insects, birds and animals, they provide more food for moths and butterflies than any other plant. Note that oak trees and many other California natives prefer wet winters and dry summers. Irrigating oaks in summer can kill established trees.

Best time to plant

Fall is the perfect time to choose and plant a landscape tree. Local nurseries typically have a large selection of plants ready for fall planting. When the air temperature is cooler than the soil temperature, plants put more energy into root growth instead of new top growth.

As a result, trees planted in the fall have heartier root systems and are stronger plants overall. Hopefully fall and winter rains keep the soil moisture constant without the need for irrigation.

Where, how to plant

Be sure to choose a tree that looks healthy, has a strong branch structure and no visible injuries to the trunk. Consider the height and width of the mature tree when deciding on the right tree and the perfect spot. Then select a location that gives limbs and roots plenty of room to grow.

Correctly planting the tree is easy to do and critical to ensuring that it will thrive. This short video shows you how to plant and support the tree in its early years bit.ly/4cxwLgi.

To enhance ongoing water conservation, soil health and weed control, maintain a 3- to 5-inch layer of mulch around the tree, leaving 3 to 6 inches of bare earth around the trunk. Once established, trees require minimal care and maintenance.

Planting a tree is a great idea for your garden and important for enhancing the overall health of our community and environment.



Crepe Myrtle Tree

Contributors to this week's column were Kim Roberts, Joy Lanzendorfer and Karen Felker. The UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County <https://sonomamg.ucanr.edu/> provides environmentally sustainable, science-based horticultural information to Sonoma County home gardeners. Send your gardening questions to scmgpd@gmail.com. You will receive answers to your questions either in this newspaper or from our Information Desk. You can contact the Information Desk directly at 707-565-2608 or mqsonoma@ucanr.edu