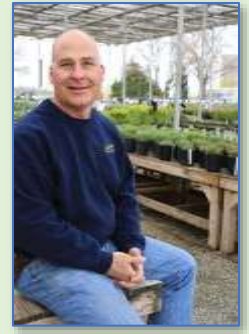


Choosing the Correct Tree

By Ed Dillingham

Cameron Rees, General Manager of Skinner's Garden Store, provided an informative presentation on choosing the correct tree for your landscape at the Master Gardeners' Aug. 1, 2017 Advanced Training at the Shawnee County Extension Meeting Room. Cameron's first piece of advice was to remember that trees are a long-term investment, therefore, they should have staying power. You need to do your homework and, because so many new varieties are being introduced, it is best to talk to an established nursery to get the variety that serves your needs. Choose a long-term winner with a good track record. If you want to experiment, do so where failure can be easily and cheaply corrected.



In Kansas, a tree with staying power needs to be heat and drought tolerant, winter hardy, disease resistant, tough and not prone to wind damage. After choosing a tree with staying power, you need to consider the space available for a full-grown tree (height and width), tree shape and, finally, leaf color and other desired aesthetics.

Acceptable trees can be either conifers or deciduous. Conifers belong to one of four groups of plants: Juniper, Pine, Spruce and Arborvitae. Junipers come in all shapes, sizes and color, are very heat and drought tolerant, tough and reliable. They are used extensively in windbreaks in Kansas. The only variety recommended was the Taylor Juniper which grows into a very narrow form. Pines are prone to pine wilt and needle blight diseases and suffer drought losses. They should be used sparingly. A common pine used in Kansas is the Eastern White Pine. Spruces have lots of forms, shapes, sizes and colors but are less drought resistance than pines. The Colorado, Norway and White spruces make up most of the spruces seen in Kansas. Arborvitaes are quite popular and come in many forms but tend to be tall and narrow. However, they are not heat or drought tolerant, so cannot be neglected. They need to be irrigated and grown on the north side of a building. True cedar trees are not winter hardy in Kansas and should be used sparingly with no expectation for long-term, old growth.

Deciduous trees are the most popular trees for most home settings. Since the demise of the elm trees due to the Dutch elm disease, maple and oak trees are the trees of choice in Kansas. Thirty years ago, the silver maple was the tree of choice. However, homeowners quickly discovered that it was very brittle, leaving lots of twigs to pick up after each windstorm and its roots ran across the top of the ground creating grass growing and mowing problems. It has since been replaced with red and silver maple hybrids that provide good growth habits. Popular varieties are Autumn Blaze, Red Sunset and Redpointe. Other hybrids are being quickly introduced to improve selections for tree size and form and for leaf color. Oak trees are another good choice as they are tough and durable and some varieties have good growth rates. However, avoid the pin oak (which is considered the silver maple of oaks) because it is prone to too many problems. There are many red oaks and white oaks and even a fast-growing hybrid Heritage oak suitable for home use. But remember that all current oaks produce acorns so location needs to be selective.

Other trees mentioned were:

- Ginkgo - tough, great yellow fall leaves, choose male grafted plants only
- Black Gum – great fall color
- Pawpaw – typically an understory tree with fruit, but flowers stink
- Serviceberry - shrubby tough native tree, edible fruit. Autumn Brilliance variety most common
- Redbud - small tough native tree, many varieties with different forms, leaf shape and color
- Seven-son Flower – small tree with late summer bloom and great fall leaf color
- Magnolia – multi-stem, winter hardy tree but early spring blooms get nipped frequently by late frosts. Hybrids with many bloom colors
- Kentucky Coffeetree – native, choose fruitless varieties such as Espresso
- American Elm – Dutch elm disease resistant varieties such as Valley Forge, Princeton, Prairie Expedition and other varieties are available and can be safely planted.
- Common Persimmon – native tree with great looking foliage produces edible fruit which attracts birds, deer and insects
- Yellowwood – medium size tree with yellow blooms appearing in late spring or early summer

Cameron's final word of advice: Don't plant the same types of trees in your yard or even what is in your neighborhood – remember what Dutch elm disease did to the elm trees and what the emerald ash borer will be doing to the ash trees.