

TREE PLANTING/SELECTION FOR THE HOME LANDSCAPE

Thinking of planting trees in your yard?

Every spring brings people to start thinking of planting trees in their yards. There are things to think about and steps to take to provide a good choice and not future headaches. I have always been an advocate of planting trees, just the right ones. I tell people all the time you should plant trees for the next generation to enjoy, not to have to deal with the poor choices and placement of trees we make. Trees give us many benefits like shade, windbreaks, shelter, wood products, and many more. However, trees can cause many more problems when they start doing what they are designed to do and that is grow and capture as much of the environment around them so they can reproduce offspring.

So what should you plant? This is where you need to do your homework and not create more headaches later. It is always better to plant trees “native” to our area. Take into account where you want to plant it. Will it fit that space when it is mature? Think about the space a six-foot tall tree bought at the nursery will need when 30 feet tall. Some trees identification cards at the nursery will tell you the mature height, but not always the mature width. Planting trees next to buildings, power lines, driveways, etc. could lead to major issues as it matures. Think about the mature version of the tree. Not the six-foot-tall version with a colorful tag on it to help make a sale. Again, do your homework on what tree to plant and where to plant it.

Next comes digging the hole for your tree of choice. When planting balled and burlapped or container-grown trees in well-drained soils, dig a hole that is 2 to 3 times wider than the diameter of the tree’s root ball. The depth of the hole should be 2 or 3 inches less than the height of the root ball. Slope the sides of the hole so the top of the hole is several inches wider than the bottom. Too often, the hole is dug too deep or too shallow and the root collar (the point where the tree stem meets the soil surface) ends up out of the ground too high or too deep. Both will cause the tree to struggle to reestablish and could kill it.

Trees not to plant:

Every spring we enjoy the beautiful flowering of many trees. Cherry blossoms come to mind. However, there is another “showy” tree that blossoms every spring that you should not plant. The dreaded Callery or Bradford Pear is one tree you should not plant, ever! Other names this pear nemesis goes by is

Aristocrat, Chanticleer and Cleveland Select. A bad tree by any name is still a bad tree. The breeding of this pear was to help fight disease issues in native pear trees. They were thought to be sterile, but they are not.

They are invasive to the point that the Ohio Department of Natural Resources added the Callery/Bradford pear to the state's invasive species listing in 2018. In 2023 it will be illegal to buy or plant this species in Ohio. This is a good move, it is just about 20 years too late. The ones planted are spreading exponentially and are causing serious problems. They were bred to not bear fruit, but they do. Birds gorge on the plentiful, but low energy fruit then distribute seeds in their waste everywhere and the next tree takes off creating an endless and devastating cycle. Driving around you will see the effect of this unchecked, invasive species. A good example is to look at the hillside off Glen drive in Millersburg between the coin laundromat and Rodhe's IGA. The thick impenetrable mass of Callery pears are taking over the area choking out any possibility of native trees to compete with it.

Callery/Bradford pears are weak structured with steep "V" notched branches that are prone to breaking off in ice, snow, and windy conditions. They will get to roughly 10 to 15 years old and then start falling apart. The other issue is the waxy leaves decompose very slowly causing headaches in landscape and street tree settings, as well as compost piles. Simply put, please DO NOT plant a Callery/Bradford pear and if have one now, cut it down before its invasive seeds are spread any further or it falls apart.

Other trees to never plant in your landscape or anywhere for that matter are listed below and the quick version of why to not plant.

- Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*) is a fast-growing, aggressive tree that tolerates all kinds of difficult growing conditions. But it's messy, seeds itself and frankly isn't the most attractive tree. Siberian elm is also weak-wooded and prone to storm and ice damage.
- Tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) is very much misnamed. It is nonnative, invasive, dirty, messy, smelly and just not suited to home landscapes. It seeds itself, but worse yet; it gives off a chemical to kill competing vegetation, making it difficult to landscape around. This tree is also a harboring site for the Spotted Lanternfly that can cause great economic losses for fruit tree and

grape growers. This invasive insect is just 15 miles from the Ohio border in Pennsylvania right now.

- Lombardy poplar (*Populus nigra*) was once beloved as a quick-growing screen tree. Growing 4 to 5 feet a year—in an upright shape that fit many backyards—it was the perfect tree. Until it was not. Homeowners quickly found out that the Lombardy poplar had a limited shelf life of about 15 years, thanks to an all-too-common canker disease. Better to purchase the largest evergreen trees you can afford and space them out appropriately (mature size) and give them time to create the desired screen you are looking for.
- Weeping willow (*Salix babylonica*) is a beautiful tree in the right environment like when seen along the shoreline. However, it is much too big and messy for the typical home landscape. Add in the fact that the roots go everywhere in search of water (particularly problematic near septic systems, sewer pipes, curtain drains around home foundations), so keep them out of your yard. They are also messy and will drop limbs and leaves all summer long. You will continually have keep trimming up the lower limbs in order to mow under it.
- Staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*) is a relative of poison ivy and causes allergic skin reactions in many (but not all) people. It is quite attractive in fall, when it turns color, but its roots keep popping up new sprouts, so before you know it, you have a colony of staghorn sumacs giving your skin the willies.
- Mulberry (*Morus* spp.) is a messy tree you do not want anywhere near your clothes line, driveway, walkway, porch, deck, patio, pool, cars, let's get straight to the point: you don't want this tree in your yard, period. The fruit stains everything it comes in contact with. Yes, the fruit is edible, but it is rather bland and the birds get most of it, and then leave highly staining droppings everywhere. Mulberries also grow readily from seed, so you will undoubtedly have more weeding to do in the years to come.
- Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) is a great tree to have in your yard—IF it is a male tree. It grows at a slow to moderate pace and has a pretty shape, beautiful fall foliage, and a lineage that dates to the time of the dinosaurs. However if you get a female ginkgo in your yard, it will drop messy fruit

in fall that smells a like a combination of vomit and dog poo when it starts to rot. You can ask for a male tree, but it is not always 100% accurate.

- Cottonwood (*Populus deltoids*) is a majestic, awe-inspiring tree when it matures. However, its roots can be problematic around house foundations and it releases cottony seeds in late spring/early summer that can be a nuisance if they are sticking to your window screens. The trees are also messy, continually dropping leaves and sticks. Best left in nature helping to keep creek banks from eroding.
- Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) is a fast-growing hardwood tree with fragrant white flowers. The wood is heavy and holds a lot of fuel value, so it is a good tree to have around if you need firewood. However, it is brittle and has sharp thorns that will puncture lawn mower tires. In addition, black locust tends to seed itself a little too generously. As a result, this tree is often a pest and considered invasive in some areas.
- Russian olive (*Eleagnus angustifolia*) or Autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) are tough, a little too tough, meaning you cannot kill them easily. Both imported, the Russian olive from southern Europe and Autumn olive from Asia. Both have become invasive. They might not seem like such a bad thing, but Russian and Autumn olives are thugs. They produce high volumes of low energy fruit. Birds eat the fruit and distributes the seeds in their waste. Then the trees sprout into groves so thick it crowds out other plants and can only be passable on your hand and knees. Once thought to be good deer habitat, but they will get so thick even the deer cannot get through them. Cut them down and they continue to re-sprout, making them an invasive pest. Chemically killing them is the only option and it will take years of treatments to get all the re sprouts treated. They are also on Ohio's invasive species list.
- Silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*) is often called the ugly duckling of the maple family. While some manage to put out a bit of fall color, the show pales in comparison to the superior sugar, black and Japanese maples. A rapid grower, silver maple tends to develop multiple competing main stems or trunks. Being a soft maple they tend to snap off larger limbs in storms and ice events which then creates center rot. These make great places for critters to hide during the day and giving easy access to your garden and flowers at night. Its shallow rooting and tendency

to push up “knee” roots will wreak havoc on lawn mower blades. Besides all this they are messy, and just not a great yard tree.

- Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) was overplanted in the 1960’s as a street tree when Dutch elm disease decimated the American elm population. People are drawn to the cultivar called “Crimson King” as they have the purple leaves. It is a pretty tree with nice fall foliage, but Norway maples are nonnative and weak trees. Just when it gets to be a good shade tree, it will up and die or start falling apart.

Some folks would say any maple is bad to plant as the fruit known as samaras (or most people call them helicopters or whirlybirds) get into the landscape and hundreds of little sprouts pop up in summer. Better to deal with samaras than Hickory nuts or Catalpa tree seedpods in your yard that become missiles out from under the mower.

ODNR has a complete listing of invasive species to not plant and alternatives to plant as well as many other great tree resources on their web site that I encourage you to use before you go planting something that will cause you headaches later. Look to <http://forestry.ohiodnr.gov/> for more information on trees to plant. Then look at the invasive species to avoid at <http://forestry.ohiodnr.gov/invasive> .

To reach me during this stay at home order due to COVID 19 you can reach me by email at graham.124@osu.edu and I will help you. Your OSU Extension office is still open virtually and working from our homes and here to continue serving you. Our web page has many resources for your convenience on COVID 19 and many other topics at <https://holmes.osu.edu/home> . You can call and leave a message and it will be forwarded on to the appropriate person, call (330) 674-3015 or email us with the addresses listed here.

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