

Ask a Master Gardener

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Kitty Barr, Master Gardener Extension Volunteer

Q. I'm thinking of planting several trees so in future years we can enjoy shade and a cooler garden (or yard, as is said in the South). What would you suggest regarding types of trees? Liz B., a newcomer from the UK

A. This is the perfect time of year to begin your decision making about trees to plant. The preferable time to plant trees and shrubs here in growing zone 7B will be November – February. Hopefully we will get winter rains to give the root systems of your new trees a good start before next summer. When trees drop their leaves they're in a dormant state, spending leaf growing energy on growing roots all winter. Therefore planting in winter months give trees time to establish new roots in their new home – your yard (garden).

I am going to suggest trees native to our area because they will be ones that will have a better chance of survival since they are acclimated to our pests, diseases, heat and cold. Drought resistant trees have smaller leaves, like willow oaks, rather than the poplar with its large fragile leaves which have more area exposed to sunlight. Trees that use water efficiently and save you from watering or irrigating frequently are perfect for your purpose. More municipalities are restricting water usage so let's look for trees that can withstand our late summer and fall droughts.

Besides natives with small or narrow leaves, other drought characteristics are trees with deep upright multi-layered crowns rather than flat wide spreading ones. Oaks, ash, and hickory are more water efficient than those with leaf canopies that concentrate leaves in single layers along the outer edges of the tree crown (beech, sourwood, redbud, magnolia). Drought tolerant trees usually have a thicker waxier leaf and a thick bark.

Here is a longer list of good drought resistant trees for our climate: Red maple, Hickory, Hackberry, Eastern Redbud, Persimmon, Ginkgo, Honey Locust, Hollies, Black Walnut, Golden Raintree, Oaks (post, willow, live, black, pin, scarlet, southern red, and northern red), Sumacs, Sassafras, Elms (especially the Lace bark elm).

Wait until late October to do your shopping as it will be cooler weather for you and your new tree. It will probably come in a ball of burlap. Please, please dig a BIG hole, at least 3 times as wide as the ball, but no deeper than the ball. Remove all the string or wire and all burlap, cut any encircling roots and plant on solid ground at the bottom of the hole. Let the top of the root ball be about one inch above the surrounding ground surface.

Fill in the hole with all the loose soil, watering thoroughly as you fill – to fill in air spaces. If you use supporting ties, which will only be necessary if you are planting in an especially windy spot, use cloth or if using wire be sure to cover the wire with pieces of old hose so they don't cut into the bark of your young tree. Remove all supports after one year.

Water deeply twice a week. Less frequent deep watering is better than frequent shallow watering. Deep watering encourages roots to grow deep in the soil. It is possible to drown a plant; they need air in the soil. Don't water so much that the ground is mushy. In a few years you will have a lovely shade tree and a cooler Southern garden.

The trees we plant will be enjoyed by our grandchildren. The trees we enjoy were planted by our foresighted elders. Can we all make Carrollton greener? For answers to your gardening questions, contact a Carroll County Master Gardener Extension Volunteer at 770-836-8546, via e-mail at ccmg@uga.edu or visit our office in the Ag Center at 900 Newnan Road in Carrollton.