

The Augusta Chronicle

COLUMNS

Campbell Vaughn: Those looking to replace trees lost in hurricane, here are some to consider

Campbell Vaughn Columnist

Published 4:44 a.m. ET Oct. 23, 2024 | Updated 4:44 a.m. ET Oct. 23, 2024

The question of the week has been coming from optimistic folks trying to figure out what to do to replace the open canopy caused by that nasty Helene. I have been riding the roads a bunch just trying to sort out some of the damage done to the area, but I still can barely put my head around it.

I have been trying to count the rings on some of the larger trees cut off at the base that I have seen in the area. For those of you who may not know this, if you look at a cross section of a tree, you will see there are a series of different colored rings. Each one you see indicates a year of growth.

When the gaps are wider between rings, the growing season was a good year. The most likely cause for wide gaps is that it was probably moist throughout the growing season. On the other hand, when the rings are tight together, there was a large stressor on the plant like an extended drought. And to take it a little further, the lighter colors are spring and early summer growth, while the darker bands are late summer and fall growth. In the wild, you can sometimes see scars in the rings from where a tree was in a fire.

I counted the rings on a large pine tree that I had to cut down at the family cabin in Lincoln County and it was just about 100 years old.

On Barrett Lane off Walton Way, my buddy Zach counted close to 150 rings on a fallen oak that had to be one of the largest oaks in the area. The owner of the tree called me the day after it had fallen because we had admired the tree for many years together. I am so sad for the loss of the specimen and feel for the neighbor's house that it hit when it blew across the road. It was a monster. I don't know how they even cut it to move it.

I stopped by Hogg's house yesterday and they were concerned about all their shade plants now being full sun plants and what to do about starting to build back tree canopy. I loved the optimism for trying to get started as soon as possible since this is the time of year to begin planting.

Campbell Vaughn: Giant pumpkins are incredible, not easy to grow in Augusta

I thought I would share with you some of my favorite trees to replant for some of the biggest concerns I am hearing from clients.

If you lost screening plants that hide you from your new view of the neighbor's hot tub, I am a big fan of chindo viburnum, tea olive, Fortune's osmanthus, wax myrtle, loquat, magnolias, most hollies (Nellie R Stevens is the biggest of the group), Arizona Blue Cypress and Easter Red Cedar. Don't use Leyland Cypress for a lot of reasons. Green giant arborvitae can be good but finicky. There are probably plenty of others, but that is a good start.

If you are looking for canopy because your shade garden is now hotter than the Sahara Desert, there are some great large trees that grow at a decent rate. Even if you start with a 7 or 15 gallon, you can get a lot of growth in a few years. Tulip poplar is going to be the fastest grower and provide the best canopy of most any tree you can find. It is also a native. Black gum, bald cypress, dawn redwood and a host of oaks including live, shumard, scarlet, swamp chestnut, white and willow are great long-term trees that will get some shade going eventually. And don't forget about reforesting the pines. Loblolly and long leaf pines grow fast and full when they don't have to compete for sun.

As for medium trees try trident maple, Chinese pistache, eastern redcedar, dogwood, crape myrtle, and several types of magnolias including the Sweetbay (needs a little filtered sun), Little Gem, and Bracken Brown Beauty.

Smaller trees might include chaste tree, both the native and Chinese fringe trees, star magnolia, some Japanese maples, dogwoods and wax myrtle.

I set up an email address (picturesforuga@gmail.com) that I would love for you to send some pictures of some of the giant trunks you are seeing. Count the rings and see how old they are. For the largest one that I get that is from the Augusta area, I will do something special for you like make my son mow your lawn or get you a UGA Extension T-shirt.

